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FENFO

SOMETHING TO SAY

## Hooray For the Riff Raff

"When you run away at 17, it's  
definitely a cry for attention."

# penguin eggs

## julie fowlis



duncan chisholm  
the milk carton kids  
ew collins  
estire pic-bois  
& elizabeth

ML

5

P46

no.79

2018

MUSIC

Issue No. 79 autumn 2018 \$5.99



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**Festival  
Place THE PLACE FOR CELTIC**

**Julie Fowlis  
October 18  
7:30 p.m.**

## **Celtic Shows**

**Heather Rankin  
October 14  
The Once  
October 25**

**Oysterband  
November 3  
Lennie Gallant  
November 9**

**April Verch:  
The April Verch Anthology  
January 26  
Barra MacNeils  
March 16**

**Box Office: 780-449-3378  
[www.festivalplace.ab.ca](http://www.festivalplace.ab.ca)**



**STRATHCONA  
COUNTY**



# Cover Story

## 42 Julie Fowlis

A torchbearer for a new generation of Scots Gaelic speakers, she has sang on an Oscar-winning animated film, skirted with the pop charts in the U.K., and collaborated with the likes of Mary Chapin Carpenter and Le Vent du Nord.

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Arguably the pre-eminent fiddle composer working within the margins of traditional music.

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They still sing traditional American folk songs only now they are embellished with hints of ambient electronica.

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Two old friends roll back the years to create a tasteful recording inspired by Newfoundland's past and present.

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From busking on the streets of Vancouver, he has developed into a high-profile, virtuoso mandolin player.

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She fled an arranged marriage in West Africa to record for one of world music's most prestigious labels and to sing alongside the likes of Paul McCartney.

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His latest recording took three years to complete and tackles such weighty issues as the global refugee crisis and imminent environmental concerns.

## 34 Eliza Gilkyson

She wraps hard questions in beautiful music as she comments on the precarious state of humankind.

## 36 Mick Flannery

He's big on misery, yet his songs range from philosophical to humorous as he details the seedy underbelly of his native Ireland.

## 38 L'Orchestre Pic-bois

The Woodpecker Orchestra knows no boundaries as it flits from farmer's jazz to bluegrass amidst a backdrop of traditional Québécois tunes.

## 40 Steve Dawson

Multi-talented musician and producer has just made a uniquely vital and beautiful album that takes North American roots music into new territory.





Thanks for the first 20 years of Black Hen, folks! 1998-2018  
2 stunning new releases available now...



www.blackhenmusic.com

# Steve Dawson Lucky Hand

The acclaimed new acoustic instrumental album from multi Juno-Award winning artist and producer Steve Dawson. Featuring appearances by Charlie McCoy, John Reischman, and string arrangements by Jesse Zubot.



"...a beautiful, genre-stretching collection of guitar instrumentals — moods from joyful to poignant, expressed through some of the coolest fingerpicking you're likely to hear." - Bruce Cockburn

"...I find this song cycle to be intelligent and challenging; joyful and deeply romantic; both earthy and untethered."  
- Joe Henry

"Dawson's influences reportedly range from Doc Watson and Chet Atkins to Ry Cooder and Van Dyke Parks, and the list of progenitors makes sense, given the richly textured songs on Lucky Hand, all of which are loaded with surprising twists and turns, and consistently engaging." - No Depression

# KAT DANSER Goin' Gone

Edmonton's Kat Danser doesn't just play the blues - she studies it, lives it, breathes it and elevates it from sweaty, smoky beer joints to elegant, centre stage in the finest of concert halls. Her sweet vocals, and instrumental prowess beautifully combine with her sharp wit and commanding stage presence to deliver unfailingly memorable live performances.

Produced by Steve Dawson



"...Conjures the deep blues of more southern climes – if not the very Crossroads where the blues began – Danser proves a talent that doesn't come along often."

Eric Thom – Maverick UK

Catch these and other Black Hen artists on tour this Fall/Winter.

**FACTOR**

This project has been made possible in part by the Government of Canada. Ce projet a été rendu possible en partie grâce au gouvernement du Canada.

**Canada**



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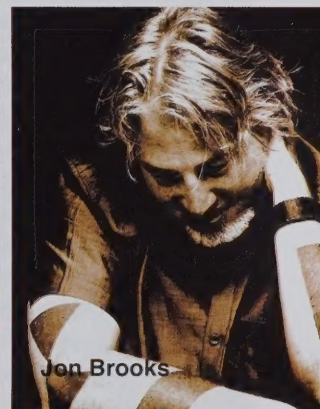
Tom Russell salutes two of his heroes: Ian & Sylvia.



Anna & Elizabeth



Fatoumata Diawara



Jon Brooks



Andrew Collins



Eliza Gilkyson



Hooray For The Riff Raff



# James Keelaghan & Jez Lowe



## ON TOUR 2018

SEPTEMBER

27 - Green Willow, Wilmington DE -

610 566 4932

28 - United Methodist Church, Timonium MD -

410 252 5500

29 - Folklore Soc of Greater Washington DC -

202 829 9882

30 - Private Concert, Ewing NJ

OCTOBER

2 - Stonecroft Folk, Ingersoll ON -

519 423 6797

3 - Lincoln Alexander Centre, Hamilton ON -

905 528 5000

5 - Concerts in the Gallery, New Bedford MA -

508 673 8523

6 - Somerville Museum, MA

617 666 9810

7 - Concerts in the Schoolhouse, Lower Cabot VT -

802 793 3016

11 - Granite City Folklore Soc. St Cloud MN -

320 252 9475

12 - Grassroots Concerts Nisswa MN -

218 294 092

13 - W. Denmark Lutheran Church Luck WI -

westdenmark.org

14 - West End Cultural Centre, Winnipeg MB -

204 783 6918

15 - The Exchange, Regina SK -

306 780 9495

17 - Tir Na Nog Theatre, Bowen Island BC -

biac.ca

18 - Mary Windspear Theatre, Sidney BC -

250 656 0275

19 - Fish Creek Concerts, Calgary AB -

1 800 838 3006

21 - Sundre Arts Centre, Sundre, AB -

www.sundreartscentre.com

www.keelaghan.com

www.jezlowe.com

## stingray radio

- The Fugitives**  
The Promise Of Strangers (Borealis)
- Pharis & Jason Romero**  
Sweet Old Religion (Lula Records)
- Braden Gates**  
Perfect Shade Of Blue (Independent)
- Rosie & The Riveters**  
Ms. Behave (Independent)
- El Coyote**  
El Coyote (Independent)
- True North**  
Open Road, Broken Heart (Borealis)
- Rose-Erin Stokes**  
Fragments (Independent)
- Chris Ronald**  
In The Unknown (Independent)
- Ashley Condon**  
Can You Hear Me (Independent)
- The Deep Dark Woods**  
Yarrow (Six Shooter Records)

The most-played folk and roots discs played nationally by Stingray Music throughout May, June, and July, 2018.

## fred's

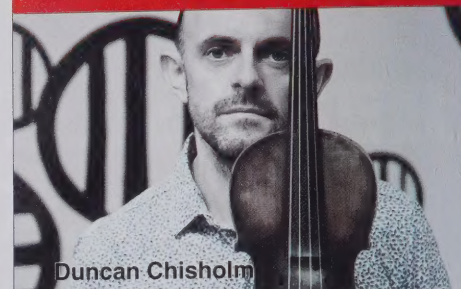
- The Once**  
Time Enough (Borealis)
- Ennis Sisters**  
Keeping Time (Independent)
- Irish Descendants**  
Is Your Rhubarb Up (Independent)
- Anita Best & Sandy Morris**  
Some Songs (Independent)
- Brad Tuck**  
On These Waters (Independent)

Based on album sales for May, June and July, 2018, at Freds Records, 198 Duckworth Street, St. John's, NL, 1C 1G5



Buddy Guy

## duncan chisholm's 10 of the best



Duncan Chisholm

**Martyn Bennett**  
Bothy Culture (Rykodisc)

**The Bothy Band**  
Old Hag You Have Killed Me (Mulligan Records)

**Phil Cunningham**  
Airs and Graces (Green Linnet Records)

**Flook**  
Rubai (Flatfish Records)

**Dick Gaughan**  
Handful of Earth (Topic Records)

**Kan**  
Sleeper (Kan Music)

**Dougie MacLean**  
Indigenous (Dunkeld Records)

**Moving Hearts**  
The Storm (Tara Music)

**Runrig**  
Recovery (Ridge Records)

**Silly Wizard**  
Silly Wizard Live In America (Green Linnet Records)

Scottish fiddler Duncan Chisholm's latest recording is *Sandwood*. Our feature on Duncan runs on page 20.

## blackbyrd

- Dave Alvin & Jimmie Dale Gilmore**  
Downey to Lubbock (Yep Roc)
- Neko Case**  
Hell-On (Anti)
- Mariel Buckley**  
Driving in the Dark (Independent)
- Courtney Barnett**  
Tell Me How You Really Feel (MOM & POP)
- Alanis Obomsawin**  
Bush Lady (Constellation)
- The Milk Carton Kids**  
All the Things I did and all the Things I didn't do (Epitaph)
- Various Artists**  
African Scream Contest 2 (Analog Africa)
- Michael Rault**  
It's a new day Tonight (Sleepless)
- Cowboy Junkies**  
All That Reckoning (Latent Records)
- Buddy Guy**  
The Blues is Alive and Well (RCA)

Based on album sales for May, June and July, 2018, at Blackbyrd Myozik, 10442-82 Ave., Edmonton, AB, T6E 2A2 and at 1126-17 Ave., SW, Calgary, AB, T2T 0B4



## highlife

1. **Orquesta Akokan**  
Orquesta Akokan (Daptone)
2. **Peggy Lee**  
Echo Painting (Songlines)
3. **Oumou Sangare**  
Mogoya (No Format)
4. **James Hunter Six**  
Whatever It Takes (Daptone)
5. **Anouar Brahm**  
Blue Magams (ECM)
6. **Tinariwen**  
Elwan (Anti)
7. **Kendrick Lamar**  
Damn (Interscope)
8. **Dálava**  
The Book of Transfigurations (Songlines)
9. **Rhiannon Giddens**  
Freedom Highway (Nonesuch)
10. **Thievery Corporation**  
Temple of I & I (ESL)

Based on album sales for May, June and July, 2018, at Highlife Records, 1317 Commercial Drive, Vancouver, BC, V5L 3S



## backstreet

1. **Ben Harper/Charlie Musselwhite**  
No Mercy in this Land (Anti)
2. **John Prine**  
The Tree of Forgiveness (Old Farm Pony Records)
3. **Jeremy Dutcher**  
Wolastoqiyik Lintuwakona (Oh Boy)
4. **The Milk Carton Kids**  
All the Things I did and all the Things I didn't do (Epitaph)
5. **Brandi Carlile**  
By the Way I Forgive You (Elektra)
6. **Anna & Elizabeth**  
The Invisible Comes To Us (Smithsonian/Folkwaysh)
7. **Hovvdy**  
Cranberry (Double Double Whammy)
8. **Courtney Marie Andrews**  
May Your Kindness Remain (Fat Possum)
9. **S.Carey**  
Hundred Acres (Jagjaguwar)
10. **First Aid Kit**  
Ruins (Columbia)

Based on album sales for May, June and July, 2018, at Backstreet Records, at their Saint John and Fredricton, NB, stores.

## soundscapes

1. **Neko Case**  
Hell-On (Anti)
2. **John Prine**  
The Tree of Forgiveness (Old Farm Pony Records)
3. **Ry Cooder**  
Prodigal Son (Concord)
4. **Jennifer Castle**  
Angels of Death (Paradise Of Bachelors)
5. **Lindi Ortega -**  
Liberty (Shadowbox)
6. **Charles Lloyd & Lucinda Williams**  
Vanished Garden (Columbia)
7. **Van Morrison**  
You're Driving Me Crazy (Shadowbox)
8. **Donovan Woods**  
Both Ways (Ace)
9. **Dave Alvin & Jimmie Dale Gilmore**  
Downey to Lubbock (Yep Roc)
10. **Kacey Musgraves**  
Willie Nelson (Columbia)

Based on album sales for May, June and July, 2018, at Soundscapes, 572 College Street, Toronto, ON, M6G 1B3

## ckua radio

1. **Neko Case**  
Hell-On (Anti)
2. **Mariel Buckley**  
Driving In The Dark (Independent)
3. **Nickodemus**  
A Long Engagement (Wonderwheel)
4. **Lake Street Dive**  
Free Yourself Up (Nonesuch)
5. **David Francey**  
The Broken Heart Of Everything (Laker)
6. **Angélique Kidjo**  
Remain In Light (Kravenworks)
7. **Leon Bridges**  
Good Thing (Columbia)
8. **Michael Rault**  
It's A New Day Tonight (Sleepless)
9. **Nick Lowe**  
Tokyo Bay/ Crying Inside (Yep Roc)
10. **Ben Sures**  
Bad Ideas (Independent)
11. **Father John Misty**  
God's Favorite Customer (Sub Pop)
12. **Shaela Miller**  
Metaphora (Outside)
13. **Jill Barber**  
Ever After The Farewell (Outside)
14. **Aki Kumar**  
Aki Goes To Bollywood (Independent)
15. **Rosie & The Riveters**  
Ms. Behave (Independent)
16. **Shakey Graves**  
Can't Wake Up (Dualtone)
17. **Jennifer Castle**  
Angels of Death (Paradise Of Bachelors)
18. **Ruby Velle & The Soulphonics**  
State Of All Things (Independent)
19. **The Hearts**  
Sunshine (Independent)
20. **Tri Continental**  
Dust Dance (Independent)

The most-played folk, roots and world music discs on CKUA radio - www.ckua.org - throughout throughout May, June and July, 2018.



## 10 years ago

1. **Emmylou Harris**  
Is It Intended To Be (Nonesuch)
2. **Martha Wainwright**  
I Know You Are Married But I Have Feelings Too (Maple Music)
3. **Ry Cooder**  
I Flathead (Nonesuch)
4. **Elliot Brood**  
Mountain Meadow (Six Shooter)
5. **Fred Eaglesmith**  
Tinderbox (A Major Label)
6. **Fleet Foxes**  
Fleet Foxes (Sub Pop)
7. **Ron Sexsmith**  
Exit Strategy For The Soul (Warner)
8. **Orchestra Baobab**  
Made In Dakar (Nonesuch)
9. **Great Big Sea**  
Fortune's Favour (Warner)
10. **Amos Lee**  
Last Days At The Lodge (Blue Note)

Based on album charts from Penguin Eggs issue No. 39, published in the autumn of 2008





# penguin eggs

The Folk, Roots and World Music Magazine  
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This magazine takes its name from Nic Jones's wonderful album *Penguin Eggs* — a collection of mainly traditional British folk songs revitalized with extraordinary flair and ingenuity. Released in Britain in 1980, it has grown into a source of inspiration for such diverse artists as Bob Dylan, Warren Zevon and Kate Rusby.

Nic, sadly, suffered horrific injuries in a car crash in 1982 and has never fully recovered. In 2012, however, he finally made an emotional comeback, performing at several events throughout the summer. His care and respect shown for the tradition and prudence to recognize the merits of innovation makes *Penguin Eggs* such an outrageously fine recording. It's available through Topic Records. This magazine strives to reiterate its spirit.

*Penguin Eggs* magazine is published and printed in Canada and acknowledges the generous financial support from the Alberta Foundation for the Arts. We also acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through Canada Heritage and the Canada Periodical Fund (CPF) distributed through the Canada Council for the Arts.

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for the Arts



Alberta  
Foundation  
for the Arts

# Editorial

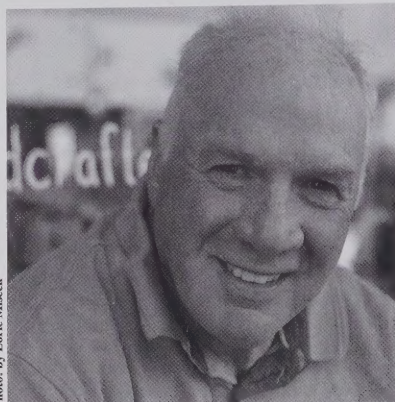


Photo: by Lorie Miesek

“Should white people sing black slave songs?”

Now there's a headline that grabbed my attention. It ran in the *The Globe & Mail*, July 6, accompanied by an editorial from Margaret Wentz. She was inspired to write about the travesty of the Montreal Jazz Festival (MJF) cancelling Betty Bonifassi's *SLĀV*—“a theatrical odyssey based on slave songs.” Conceived and written by Bonifassi over several years, and directed by Robert LePage, a luminary of Cirque du Soleil, *SLĀV* was cancelled two performances into its sold-out run due to protests outside of Montreal's Théâtre du Nouveau Monde (TNM).

The production team and cast, including lead singer Bonifassi, were predominantly white. This elicited taunts of “racism”. Protesters' placards declared “Cultural appropriation”, “White culture is theft”, “Shame”... Reviewing the event, T'Cha Dunlevy of the *Montreal Gazette* wrote: “This entire show is based on a flawed premise: that white people are altogether entitled to put on a musical theatre revue about black slavery.” His implication being, only black people can write plays about black slavery! Bilge. Creative culture transcends such abhorrent racial profiling. Merit, only, ought to assure an actor's predominance.

And yet it took the intervention of author J.K. Rowling to quell the Internet grumbling associated with

the award-winning actor Noma Dumezweni, a black woman, playing the role of Hermoine Granger—a role popularized in film by white actor Emma Watson—in the recent London theatre version of *Harry Potter And The Cursed Child*.

Betty Bonifassi has sung field hollers, work songs, and chain gang chants for more than 20 years, adapting them with striking contemporary settings to widespread acclaim. Nobody lined up outside her gigs accusing her of cultural appropriation. Her initial source material for *SLĀV* came from Pete Seeger's LP *Negro Songs of Protest* and Alan Lomax's numerous field recordings. Lomax, of course, discovered the likes of Lead Belly and Muddy Waters, artists who would fuel the British blues boom of the 1960s and give rise to such bands as The Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin, and Fleetwood Mac. Should we now build bonfires to burn their discs because of their unbridled infatuation and respect for African-American roots music? Should we add Paul Simon's *Graceland* to the pile? He ignored a cultural boycott to make his iconic recording of, essentially, township jive with South African musicians and singers. Or how about Robert Plant and the Sensational Space Shifters' recording *Lullaby ... And The Ceaseless Roar*—a disc largely influenced by the sounds of West and Sub-Saharan Africa?

No borders nor barriers can curtail the flow of musical inspiration and experimentation. All music thrives on reinvention, no matter the source, otherwise it grows stale and boring. And yet its audiences are occasionally reluctant to accept change. Bob Dylan reinventing himself, backed by a rock band, is a prime example. But a white woman singing black slave songs you would hardly associate with controversy. But apparently, there's no room for prudent reflection when the mob brays in Montreal.

Roddy Campbell



# The Record That Changed My Life



**Oysterband's John Jones pays homage to an LP of weird rituals and dead wrens: Steeleye Span's strident *Please To See The King*.**

It is quite a claim to say a record changed your life but *Please To See The King* by Steeleye Span really did just that.

As a working-class mod from Yorkshire with a classic northern chip on the shoulder thrown into the gentle, middle-class, leafy surroundings of Exeter University campus in the early '70s as hair, beards, and guitar solos got longer, I was a bit lost—to say the least. I had been in a short-lived soul band at school and I loved singing but deep down I knew I could never be Darrell Banks, Wilson Pickett, or either Sam or Dave.

My sociology tutor (that tells you everything), John Hughes, seeing I was struggling socially, invited me down to his weekly folk club, The Jolly Porter, Exeter Traditional Folk Song Club, where people just drank and sang strange choruses with words I did not understand. *Tavistock Goosey Fair* took me months to decipher but it never stopped me joining in. I loved the sharing of it; the harmonies, the togetherness, and who cares what we were really singing.

At this time, my forays to the Left Bank record store, Exeter High Street, were more frequent than my attendance at lectures and certainly more illuminating than Marx or Durkheim. Having mumbled the words “folk music” so quietly on being asked what

my “musical direction was this week”, I was asked to repeat them and was handed an LP sleeve that seemed to be made out of parchment or hessian cloth, like an old book or manuscript. Moments later, I stood in my cubicle, put the primitive headphones on, and the journey began...

Whatever these strident, jangly sounds were (it sounded like The Byrds circa 1866), I loved it. Whoever these ancient-sounding voices were, I loved them—especially the pure, high, female voice that inhabited these strange modal tunes with such effortless, timeless ease. There were titles: *The Blacksmith*, *Boys of Bedlam*, *False Knight on the Road*, that just resonated with mystery and history and...it felt like mine.

Here was my past in song—eccentric, rural, mad—and it made me smile. Stories poured forth and dulcimers (what the hell were they?) jangled, fiddles weaved, mandolins chimed, and melodic bass lines underpinned the story and the drums—I swear I heard drums on the first 12 listens! No drums! Nothing was the same on this record and nothing was the same for me after hearing it.

Let me highlight just one track, which gives the album its title. *The King*, as it is called, is a strange song with church-like harmonies. Which king are they singing about? Then you read the sleeve notes, essential on this album, and discover that The King is a wren, the smallest bird in Britain, which came to symbolize winter. Two old ladies in Pembrokeshire, South Wales, remembered taking a dead wren in a box round the village houses to symbolize the death of winter and the coming of spring, saying, “please to see The King,” and singing the song, bringing good luck.

And so you have it: dead wrens, hard winters, weird rituals, great tunes, and Martin Carthy on Telecaster.

I soon discovered my own grandma carried the “wassail dolly” round her mining village as a child, singing, “please to see the Wessel dolly?”. These weird songs were part of me, part of the primitive history of my community and country.

I was hooked...and I still am.

By the way, wherever we are on 12th Night, 12 days after Christmas, we still sing *Please To See The King*.





1942-2018

## Aretha Franklin

**A**retha Franklin is gone. Along with Ray Charles, Franklin brought the sound of African-American gospel music into pop culture and helped create the genre we now know as soul music.

Born in Memphis, TN, on March 25, 1942, her family moved to Buffalo but settled in Detroit in 1946. There her father, Clarence LaVaughan Franklin, became pastor of the New Bethel Baptist Church—a ministry known for its superlative choir. A celebrity amongst preachers, C.L. Franklin was known as “the man with the million-dollar voice”. His sermons were broadcast on the radio and released on vinyl by Chess Records. Her mum, Barbara Siggers, was a gifted gospel singer and piano player. But due to her father’s philandering, her parents separated when Aretha was six. She was left in her father’s care. Tragically, her mum died of a heart attack in 1952.

At 12 years old, Aretha fell pregnant and gave birth to her first son, Clarence. Two years later, she had a second child, Edward.

Mahalia Jackson, widely considered as the “Queen of Gospel”, became a family friend who encouraged young Aretha to sing. Jazz

pianist Art Tatum and singers Sam Cooke and Dinah Washington frequently dropped by the Franklin home. Future Motown artists such as Smokey Robinson, Marvin Gaye, and Diana Ross lived nearby.

Aretha got her ability to project soaring, sustained notes singing in her father’s church.

She “went secular” when she was 18, recording a few albums for legendary record producer John Hammond at Columbia. She had a few hits, but the label didn’t know how to deal with her uncontained passion.

After signing with Atlantic in January 1967, producer Jerry Wexler immediately persuaded her to record at Fame Studios in Alabama with the Muscle Shoals rhythm section, the backup band behind dozens of 1960s soul hits. That session produced *I Never Loved A Man (The Way I Love You)*. As a single, it reached No. 1 on the R&B charts and No. 9 on the pop charts.

Wexler then suggested she cover the Otis Redding hit *Respect*. Franklin rewrote and rearranged the tune and it, too, was a smash hit, hailed today as a Civil Rights and feminist anthem.

It was the lead track on her Atlantic debut LP,

*I Never Loved A Man (The Way I Love You)*, perhaps the most perfect album she ever made. The first time I heard her sing *Respect* it was a life-changing experience. I played that record until the grooves turned to dust. The hits that followed, including *Chain of Fools* and *I Never Loved A Man (The Way I Love You)*, laid the foundation for soul music and gave soul singers an almost impossible standard to live up to.

*Amazing Grace*, the first gospel album she made after starting her career in pop music, remains the biggest-selling gospel album in American chart history, as well as Aretha’s best-selling album. It went double platinum in the U.S. and won a Best Soul Gospel Performance Grammy. *Amazing Grace* stands beside her debut as a timeless testament to the power of her voice and the human spirit.

The 18-time Grammy Award winner sold more than 75 million records and became the first woman to be inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. She received The Presidential Medal of Freedom, America’s highest civilian award, in 2005.

Aretha Louise Franklin died on Aug. 16 of advanced pancreatic cancer. She was 76.

The heavenly choir has a commanding new presence today, one that will force them to up their game if they want to continue singing *Hallelujah*.

—j. poet





## Tommy Peoples

Irish Fiddler and Composer

Born 1948

**T**ommy Peoples, who died on Aug. 3, 2018, aged 70, epitomized the principle of continuity in change and change in continuity. He was born into a family steeped in the Donegal fiddle tradition near St. Johnston in East Donegal—Eire's northernmost province, where locals share Ulster-Scots as the dialect in common with Ulster over the border.

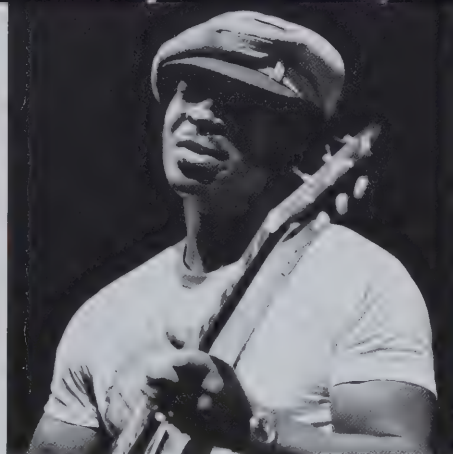
Fiddle was a family pastime. Peoples's style of playing stayed rooted but remained evolving, whether through living in Co. Clare or life experiences.

Sacked from the Garda for not apprehending one villain, he gravitated to music performing with the Green Linnet Céilí Band and 1691 before becoming an early member of the influential Bothy Band that coalesced around Dónal Lunny post-Planxty from 1975. He appeared on their self-titled 1975 debut before moving on.

Notably, he later recorded with Matt Molloy and Paul Brady. Peoples also played on Brady's *Welcome Here Kind Stranger* (1979). A later recommendation is his solo *The Quiet Glen* (1998), which broke a 15-year recording silence. His book *Óam Go hAm – From Time to Time* (2015) included handwritten tune notations, artwork, and commentary. Poor health prevented him from performing in his latter years instead he concentrated on composing.

He proved indeed "the most influential fiddler of his generation". Discussing Peoples & Brady's *The High Part of the Road* (1976), Sam Amidon declared, "I still consider Tommy my fundamental influence."

– Ken Hunt



## Matt Murphy

Celebrated Blues Sideman and Actor

Born 1929

**M**att (Guitar) Murphy, who played alongside iconic Chicago bluesman Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf, died June 15. He was 88.

Most notably, Murphy led Dan Aykroyd and John Belushi's Blues Brothers Band on stage and in their movies. They spotted him in a club in New York City, backing harmonica player James Cotton. They immediately recruited Murphy for such films as *The Blues Brothers* (1980) and *Blues Brothers 2000* (1998). Memorably, he played Aretha Franklin's soul food-cooking husband, and target of her wonderful performance of *Think* in the initial 1980 film.

Raised in Memphis, TN, Murphy moved to Chicago in 1948. Throughout the '50s, he worked with a wide variety of artists, including Ike Turner, Etta James, Willie Dixon, Chuck Berry, and Sonny Boy Williamson. Murphy recorded four solo albums in his career and was inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame in 2012.

– Roddy Campbell

## Geoffrey Oryema

Afro-beat Pioneer

Born 1953

**O**ne of Africa's most celebrated and innovative artists, Geoffrey Oryema died June 22 in Paris. He was 65.

Oryema rose to international prominence with the release of his 1990 album *Exile*. Produced by Brian Eno and released by Peter Gabriel-administered Real World Records, it led to Oryema performing extensively internationally with the World Of Music And Dance (WOMAD). He would also tour with Bruce Springsteen, Sting, Tracy Chapman, and Gabriel in the '90s, raising awareness for Amnesty International.

Oryema grew up in Soroti, Uganda. Encouraged by his father, he learned to play the nanga (a seven-string harp), the guitar, flute, and lukeme (a metal thumb-piano) and immersed himself in traditional music. He also studied avant-garde theatre. His father, Eri-nayo Wilson Oryema, was a Ugandan cabinet minister brutally murdered in 1977, allegedly on President Idi Amin's orders. Geoffrey, at the age of 24, was forced to flee the country in the middle of the night, hidden in the trunk of a car until he crossed safely into Kenya. He eventually landed in Paris and lived there in exile until 2016.

Meanwhile, he spent years playing gigs and experimenting with various musical styles thriving in Paris's clubs. It was there, in 1989, that the singer was spotted by WOMAD artistic director Thomas Brooman, and invited to perform at the festival, thus marking the beginning of his international music career. He would record two more albums for Real World, including *Beat The Border*, co-produced by Canadian Bob Ezrin, before signing with Sony International.

Oryema had been battling cancer for a number of years.

– Roddy Caampbell



Photo: by Frank Drake





SEPTEMBER 7 - TWIN BUTTE, AB

SEPTEMBER 8 - MILLARVILLE, AB

SEPTEMBER 9 - LETHBRIDGE, AB

SEPTEMBER 14 - CALGARY, AB

SEPTEMBER 15 - FERNIE, BC

SEPTEMBER 16 - CARSTAIRS, AB

SEPTEMBER 21 - CANNING, NS

SEPTEMBER 22 - MOUNT STEWART, PEI

SEPTEMBER 26 - HALIFAX, NS

SEPTEMBER 27 - FREDERICTON, NB

SEPTEMBER 28 - FREDERICTON, NB

SEPTEMBER 29 - ST. JOHN, NB

SEPTEMBER 30 - ANNAPOLIS ROYAL, NS

OCTOBER 5 - ATHABASCA, AB

OCTOBER 26, 27, 28 - VANCOUVER, BC

NOVEMBER 3 - HIGH RIVER, AB

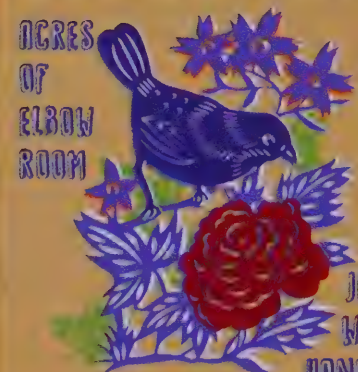
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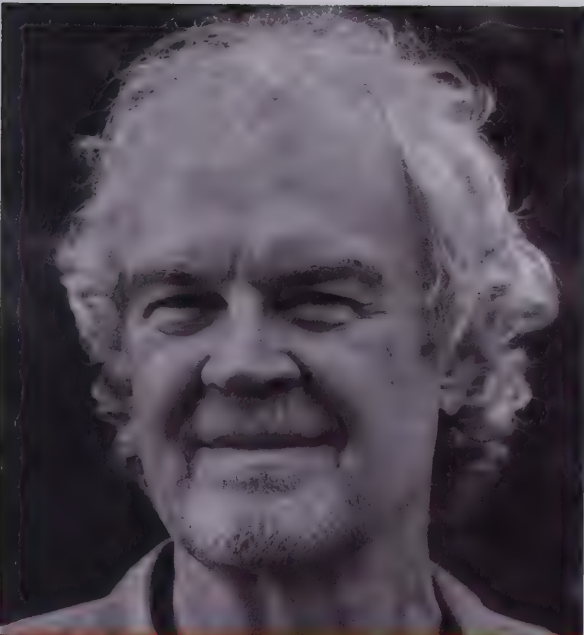
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# Holger Petersen & Geof Kulawick

**A**s of July 1, 2018, Stony Plain Records of Edmonton, AB, and True North Records of Waterdown, ON, two of Canada's oldest and prestigious independent roots and blues labels, amalgamated. The deal allows Stony Plain access to True North affiliate Linus Entertainment Inc., the leading global importer and exporter of Canadian sound recordings. It distributes such labels as Black Hen Records and Borealis Records.

Stony Plain's historical catalogue includes titles by Ian Tyson, Emmylou Harris, and Steve Earle, while True North boasts the likes of Bruce Cockburn, Gordon Lightfoot, and Buffy Sainte-Marie. Between the two, they have won an incredible 56 Juno Awards.

Roddy Campbell put the following questions to Stony Plain's Holger Petersen and True North's Geoff Kulawick.

**What inspired your amalgamation with True North?**

**HP:** A few things. Alvin Jahns, my partner at SP for almost 43 years, has been wanting to retire. Alvin has been overseeing administration, which has become more complex and time consuming. Linus has done a great job administrating their in-house labels and offered 'economy-of-scale' solutions, which ultimately benefit Stony Plain and our artists. It also frees me to focus on A&R and new projects. We

looked at various options and ultimately wanted to work with Linus/True North, a Canadian company who has been a leader in roots music marketing internationally, has passion, commitment, and vision going forward. We've known Geoff for years and feel it's a great fit all round.

**Does the company have a new name?**

**HP:** Yes, Stony Plain Rights Management.

**Are you still separate entities when signing and releasing artists?**

**HP:** Yes, I'll continue to work with SP artists and on new projects for the Stony Plain label. Some releases, like Colin James's latest, will be released in the U.S. under True North/Stony Plain. Colin is a True North artist.

**Stony Plain has been a folk, roots, and blues label, whereas True North has dabbled in pop and rock; what musical direction do you see this new entity taking?**

**GK:** True North Records will be signing more artists on the folk/singer/songwriter side, and Stony Plain Rights Management, I expect, will be signing more blues and Americana—a lot depends on what Holger wants to pursue—he's got great ears and

relationships with artists. I am excited to see what he wants to do next!

**What benefits do you see in this joint venture?**

**HP:** Economies of scale in administration, manufacturing, marketing, promotion, etc. A larger, dedicated team plus more distribution options.

**What happens now to the Stony Plain back catalogue?**

**HP:** It will remain intact and available through our current distributors with more international distribution options in the future.

**What do you see as the future for hard copy CDs?**

**HP:** In our blues and roots music world, I think the CD will continue to be the dominant format internationally for some time to come.

**GK:** Our physical sales of CDs have actually increased—collectors can find whatever they want on Amazon for CDs—that wasn't possible just a few years ago. It will be a generation before CDs become obsolete in my view, for blues, roots, jazz, and other niche genres. For hip-hop, pop, and younger music consumers, it's already over.



# Introducing Dana Sipos



Dana Sipos's new indie-folk album *Trick of the Light* could be described many ways, all of them positive. There are her cogent lyrics, tasty fingerpicking, enticing voice, and singular delivery. But what strikes the listener time and again is the album's unrestrained and experimental quality, as though Sipos and producer Sandro Perri are uncomfortable with even the idea of orthodoxy.

"Unrestrained and experimental feels like a good thing to be," says the Hamilton, ON, native, whose nomadic life—she's no stranger to the Canadian north, Appalachia, and Europe—has been as unconventional as the haunting, unexpected turns the album often takes.

Perri understands Sipos's idiosyncratic ways and has showcased them using his own love of electronic music and experimental arrangements. "He helped me simplify, and that created more space for interesting productions," says Sipos. "For some songs, he gently suggested I don't do my normal fingerpicking. At first I thought that was a bit strange, but then it made so much sense and those turned out to be some of my favourite songs on the album."

The result is a record that's clearly rooted in folk music but not restricted by traditional approaches to the genre.

Folk's adaptability to experimentation doesn't surprise Sipos. "Folk music is the people's music, essentially, so it should have that broad definition. It should be whatever the people who are creating it are bringing to it."

In *Trick of the Light*, the people's music includes a deep vein of Appalachia, which surfaces in songs such as the high lonesomeness of *Blue Ridge* and the dark longing of *Shenandoah*. Although Sipos's *Hamilton* is about as un-Appalachian as it gets, she says, "The first time I went to the Blue Ridge Mountains I felt I'd been there before, but of course I hadn't. There's a kind of personal, spiritual connection, and nature is quite an important part of my life."

She's equally at home on the water. Back in 2014, she signed on with the Caravan Stage Company, an anarchist theatre troupe that made its way by sea from Florida north to upstate New York with a show that featured giant puppets, aerialists, and anti-American themes. Along the way they ran into hurricane season, were told to leave town when they

played a Bible Belt venue on the 4th of July ("The captain kind of loved that," recalls Sipos), and weathered various other adventures and misadventures.

Those months with the troupe became, on the new album, *Lily in the Window*, a folk noir tune featuring an ominous soundscape, God-fearing people, and a fast-approaching, cataclysmic storm. The song is a homage to the theatre company, especially its founders who were both in their 70s and still leading the company, says Sipos. "We were really making magic and we had no budget...I constantly draw inspiration from that."

On an album informed by experimentation and the unrestrained, *When the Body Breaks* is a standout. The song bangs and crashes about, seems devoid of rhythm or structure, and has no narrative trajectory. Yet the track, co-written with Cecil Castellucci and featuring guest artist Mary Margaret O'Hara, is absolutely compelling; a wild, visceral evocation of what Sipos describes as the burden and the blessing of being a woman.

And if you think you could capture that with any kind of orthodox musical approach, think again.

— By Pat Langston







# Introducing Frank Newsome

**F**rank Newsome is a happy man. There is peace and contentment in every note he sings and every word he says. His faith is the source of his strength and adds an inspiring power to the hymns he sings on *Gone Away With A Friend*, his first album. Newsome sings alone, in the lined out hymnody he was introduced to in the Old Regular Baptist Church.

"It's what I learned growing up," Newsome says from his Virginia home. "I went to church with my mother when I was a little boy. We walked about three miles to the church house. Those songs always make me cry. I liked it when they line the songs out like that."

Lining out is a tradition that goes back to 17th century Britain and Scotland. Many people couldn't read or write, so the preacher would sing, or chant, each line of a hymn, then the congregants would sing it.

"The moderator lines it out, then sings the same line again, with the people singing along," Newsome says. "The people sing in harmony and it makes the sweetest sound you ever heard in your life."

Bluegrass legend Ralph Stanley was Newsome's neighbour, and a fan of his sacred singing. "I knew Ralph about 50 years. He'd come to my house and I'd sing line out hymns and other songs for him. He'd put a little different tune on it and make a CD of him singing them. When he passed away, I preached and sang at his funeral."

Country star Jim Lauderdale heard Newsome sing at the annual bluegrass festival Stanley hosted. He contacted Jon Lohman at Virginia Humanities to set up a session to record Newsome so the world could hear his inspirational vocals. Lohman, Lauderdale, and engineer Mike Monseur recorded Newsome at his home church in Haysi, VA.

"They came in with all the equipment and set up a mic in my church. I sang alone, no piano. When I was done one hymn, I'd turn the page over and sing another. I took a break every 10 or 15 minutes. I sang 24 songs and they put 11 of them on the record."

The Virginia Folklife Program at Virginia Humanities released the album in 2006. Lohman contacted Free Dirt Records and the label recently picked up the album for national distribution. Since the album's initial release, Newsome has been singing at folk festivals and was named a NEA National Heritage Fellow in 2011. Despite his growing national profile, Newsome says he has no desire for a musical career.

"Jim said he wanted the world to hear me, so he helped make up the CDs with two other fellows. I was interested because we're a poor church, with a lot of folks on a fixed income. I turned in all the money I made on the album to the church, to help them out. I guess I'll keep singing, and preaching, too, as long as I'm able and the good Lord's willing that I do."

— By J. Poet



Ralph Stanley and Frank Newsome



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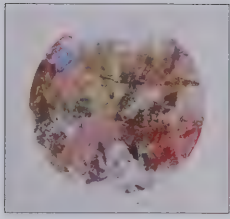
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# Introducing Annie Sumi

Chief among the many delights of Annie Sumi's new album, *In The Unknown*, is the music's orchestral richness. Strings and piano, for instance, aren't shy about making their presence felt in Sumi's folk/roots-based compositions.

Those instruments are different voices helping to tell the story, says the Guelph, ON-based singer/songwriter. "The whole production tells the story. In history [which she studied along with English at Nipissing University in North Bay], when there's only one person telling a story, it's heard in only one way, and we're missing a lot of the truth."

On the new album, those stories include *Get By*. It's about a man forced to leave his family to pursue work out west, and was sparked by a real-life leave-taking that Sumi witnessed at a bus station. The fellow sat next to Sumi on the bus, and that's when she heard his tale.

She still recalls the love she could see in the family and how she wished that love alone had been enough to sustain them. In the song, that wish becomes a meditation on the importance of hanging onto the small things that make up the big thing called life, a meditation encapsulated in the interplay between the intimacy of Sumi's voice and guitar and the swelling of sound at the song's crescendo.

Also front and centre in Sumi's music is her voice. Generous and expansive, it soars into ethereal territory to explore the richness of human experience and possibility much as the textured sound of her songs do.

It's also a voice that, like her sharp-eyed observations on life, remains moored to reality. *In Everything*, her hymn to our beleaguered planet and the role that pantheism can play in righting the wrongs we've done to it, may soar at moments but it also bottoms out, a dark and angry warning that wouldn't be out of place in the mouth of the Old Testament God.

Sumi's approach to voice allows her to explore nuance, she says. "I love the subtleties within folk music. If I was doing something harsher (with my voice), maybe the subtleties would be lost. Small things have the most impact for me."

Those small things include, in the carefree track *The City*, a stroll through an urban centre at 3 a.m. Far from being a shadowed, fear-inducing place, this one is romantic, magical. Sumi explains that it's the unexpected contrast between the dreamy city at night and the noisy, stressful place that it is during the day that gives the song its surreal flavour.

Stitching all this together are interludes, short bursts of music and sound, including the lap of waves and urban noise, between the full tracks.

"My vision for the album was trying to combine urban and natural landscapes," says Sumi. "So, we did a bunch of field recordings of sounds and turned them into introductions or outros of songs. It's like preparing the stage to evoke a certain feeling."

Feeling that helps connect us with the world is what Sumi is after with her music.

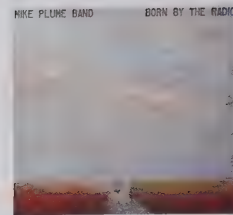
"We don't really live in a society where we're encouraged to feel everything. To take three and a half minutes of someone's day and inspire them to feel an emotion, or stop for a moment and listen, that feels like a small way of changing people's consciousness."

— By Pat Langston





# Introducing Mike Plume



It's something that could happen to anyone, really.

You're rehearsing with your group at Levon Helm's place in New York when the revered drummer and singer makes a comment that sticks with you for close to two decades. You let it slide around in your head for half of your life until you finally find a spot for the phrase to settle in a song.

Well, maybe it couldn't happen to just anyone, but it did happen to Edmonton-based singer/songwriter Mike Plume.

"Our bassist quit sometime back in 2000, so we needed to find a place to rehearse our new one," recalls Plume.

"That's when I realized I had Levon's number from a visit we'd made not too long before; he had extended an invitation for recording or rehearsing. I called him on Friday, and there we were on Monday in Woodstock, loading into his barn."

While the band settled into teaching new bassist Meck Myers their extensive discography, Plume went out for a cigarette, joined soon after by Helm. After a few minutes of listening, the drummer turned to Plume and remarked, "I can sure hear that Western wind in y'all's music." Sometimes the universe just offers you a gift, and it's up to you to find where to use it.

Flash forward 18 years and Plume, who had taken himself off the road to write songs in Nashville back in the early 2000s and help raise his daughter, found a spot for Helm's observation in *Western Wind*, a song on his latest effort, *Born By the Radio*.

"When he said that he could hear the Western wind in our music, that meant that we were a success at representing where we were from, which meant a lot to me."

*Born By the Radio* does this as much as any of his past recordings. His 12th release since 1993's *Songs From a Northern Town*, the album shows Plume at the top of his songwriting game, offering nine tracks worth of fat-free prairie roots music that clocks in at just under 35 minutes. *Western Wind* is a standout, but he's also got a number of intriguing co-writes on the album, including *Mama's Rolling Stone* (with Tim Hicks) and *Waste A Kiss On Me* (penned with Trevor Rosen of Old Dominion.)

"That's one thing I really appreciate about my time writing in Nashville," Plume reflects. "I learned so much about the craft by working with other people. Not being precious about the song, doing whatever it takes to keep it moving

forward. Like Steve Earle says, the first verse and chorus of a song is magic; the real work starts with the second verse."

Plume has recommitted to both recording and the road. He'll finish off 2018 with some solo shows across Canada, and then crank the old band back up for road action in 2019.

What does his family think of this? Why, they're all for it.

"You know, my wife and daughter sat me down and told me, 'You need to be on the road; it's the only thing you're good at,'" Plume laughs. "I guess my time as a stay-at-home dad is over."

— By Tom Murray







# Introducing Kalyna Rakel

**F**lash back six years. Kalyna Rakel was working as a bartender but music was her passion. Her parents played in bands and she was always writing songs. She knew the time was nigh to make some life changes.

Like so many young people before her, she saved some money, quit her job, and headed overseas to backpack around Europe with no idea of what road she might travel from one day to the next. One adventure led to another.

One day she woke up to discover her money and passport gone. This proved serendipitous. Rakel met a bunch of musicians and joined them in their Gypsy lifestyle, learning from their spirit and outlook on life.

The last stop found her in Paris, contemplating “je ne sais quoi”. A revelation occurred. It’s time to learn the guitar. A few YouTube videos, thousands of hours building up calluses on her fingers, and busking on street corners did the trick.

“Busking was the thing that got me into playing guitar,” Rakel explains. “That was my way of practicing and working on my music without any pressure.”

Four independent albums, mostly recorded in home studios with friends, followed. She then took her songs around the world—playing them for whoever would listen.

Now, a veteran songwriter at 27, Rakel returns with her most ambitious album to date: *Before & After*. Via a dozen songs on two sides (*Side A Before* and *Side B After*), the concept album chronicles the many stages of a relationship and comes with a 24-page companion comic book of pen sketches by the musician that corresponds with each song.

With a voice that echoes Janis Joplin with its smoky delivery, Rakel’s three major influences of jazz, folk, and blues fuse together to create a unique sound.

When the 27-year-old musician and I connect, she is just returning to her Kensington Market home in the heart of downtown Toronto; here is where she penned several of the songs (including *Who Knew* and *Taylor Swift*) on *Before & After*. In the liner notes, Rakel writes, “trust the process”. That is what the songwriter had to do in the making of this ambitious project.

Used to working on her own, she had to give in to the process and listen to her collaborators and let them help guide what the finished piece would resemble.

“It’s about trusting everyone to do his or her part,” she explains. “Sometimes, if it’s your own music you feel you want things in a certain way. I’ve always done albums on my own, so it was a real learning experience for me. Often, more magic happens when you just trust people, trust yourself, and trust the process.”

*Before & After* was inspired after meeting her producer, best friend, and bassist George Chenery. The record took more than a year and a half to complete: from the initial ordering of the songs, to rehearsing and recording the bed tracks, to mixing and mastering. The result is the most polished recording of Rakel’s young career and one she is the most proud of.

“Part of the reason I wanted to do a comic is that I remember getting albums as a kid and looking through every single picture, reading every sentence in the liner notes,” Rakel concludes. “Today, everything is downloadable and not tangible; the comic is a way to bring that physical bit of music back.”

– By David McPherson







## Duncan Chisholm

### Highland fiddler's new disc draws its inspiration from a spectacularly stunning remote bay.

By Roddy Campbell

He sports a grin as warm as the June sunshine, Duncan Chisholm, as he greets me with his usual hail-fellow-well-met bonhomie. He's in great form, too, talking up a storm and modestly counting his blessings.

In the past decade, Chisholm has emerged from the shadows of the high-powered, Highland-based, folk-rock outfit Wolfstone to become, arguably, the pre-eminent fiddle composer working within the margins of traditional music. It's a reputation unmistakably cemented in three albums comprised of his *Strathglass Trilogy*—*Affric*, *Canaich*, and *Farrar*. Each disc takes its name from the remote glens in the Highlands of Scotland that stretch southwest from the nearby village of Beaulieu. Amidst the hills there, generations of the Chisholm family

made their homes. And by any rationale, the intuitive warmth, vibrancy, and sensitivity of these three recordings offer a compelling and absorbing homage to this rugged and beautiful land.

And now Chisholm has released *Sandwood*—an album inspired by a remote bay just south of Cape Wrath, the most northern tip on the west coast of the Scottish mainland. Accessible only by boat or a four-mile hike, Sandwood Bay, with its pink sands, imposing cliffs, and impressive sea stack, Am Buachaille, is reputedly one of the most magnificent beaches in Britain. Like the scenery, Chisholm's tribute to this wild and beautiful bay is extravagantly spectacular.

"I've known about Sandwood for over 30 years but, for whatever reason, I never actually managed to get there. So it was maybe about three years ago I made my first journey, to see what I thought of the place," says Chisholm over coffee in the village café in Muir of Ord, not far from his home in Kirkhill.

"I'd read about Sandwood a lot so there was a great anticipation in going there, and I wasn't disappointed. I've got one track called *The Pilgrimage* and it's like arriving at a sacred

place for me.

"It's so beautiful and I feel so at home there. The history is amazing, because you've got some of the oldest rocks on Earth there, and the colours in the cliffs are just incredible, swirls of different colours, blues and reds; and it's where the Picts made their first home around 2,000 BC. A thousand years ago, the Vikings would be dragging their longboats across the beach. You feel an absolute connection with history. Time is meaningless. I felt incredibly connected with the place and whatever had gone before."

Chisholm would make eight trips to Sandwood in different weather during various seasons. While he brought his fiddle, he composed at home, largely from memory but prompted occasionally by photographs and film shot on location.

As with his past endeavors, he has taken bits and pieces from outside sources to embellish his new recording. He recorded Donald Shaw of Capercaillie's *Islands On The Edge* and *A Precious Place*. The latter was one of the tracks Chisholm listened to endlessly in contemplation at Sandwood Bay. Shaw would arrange the strings for the new disc that would



include a brief but moody reworking of former Bothy Band singer and composer Tríona Ní Dhomhnaill's *Snow On The High Ground* and Fraser Fifield's gloriously raucous *North To Cape Wrath - The Dark Reel*.

Furthermore, Chisholm recruited piano and flute player Hamish Napier to co-write most of the instrumentals. Napier had just recorded the impressive and critically acclaimed disc *The River*, a tribute to the River Spey, which feeds many of the celebrated distilleries that produce some of Scotland's finest malt whiskies.

"I absolutely loved *The River*. And Hamish's tunewriting," says Chisholm. "I felt it was really quite similar to my own, in many respects, and I wanted to try working with a piano player."

Napier would trek into Sandwood on his own on a stormy day, and wrote the profoundly moving *Bagh Seannabhad* (*Sandwood Bay*).

Putting the cart before the horse, somewhat, Chisholm created the titles of the tunes before he and Napier wrote the music. Several of the titles—*The Light of Tuscany*, *Dizzy Blue*, and *The Burial Clouds*—were inspired by the poetry of Seamus Heaney, Norman MacCaig, and Walt Whitman.

"Well before we wrote any music, I had the titles for all of these tunes. *The Light of Tuscany*, that's from Heaney's poem *The Altar*. The first lines are: "*When you plunged, the light of Tuscany wavered, and swung through the pool from top to bottom.*" It's a beautiful description of light and water on the clear days up at Sandwood.

"*Dizzy Blue* comes from *Summer Farm*, one of my favourite MacCaig poems. He talks about birds flying out of a barn, "*into the dizzy blue.*" That's two words that really describe the type of morning in June when I was walking along the moor to Sandwood. All life around you is in motion, and so dizzy blue, in two words, describes that morning, you know?

"*The Burial Clouds*, the title comes from Walt Whitman's poem *On The Beach At Night*. For me, *The Burial Clouds* is about standing on Sandwood, seeing a storm coming over Cape Wrath. It's moving in from the west, and is going to be on you in five minutes. It's going to bury you.

"Having that picture in your head, of that advancing squall, that feeds, along with the visuals, the music—the creative side of whatever sparks the human mind. It's really interesting; wherever I've been in the world, the indigenous music seems, somehow, to make sense with the landscape and the climate.

"There seems to be a correlation between what the human mind sees and the creative flow out of that person. If you listen to [Jean]

Sibelius's *Finlandia*, you see, tree-filled tundra. If you're listening to Vaughan Williams, you see the landscape of the east of England. You go to northern Spain and hear the music there, it speaks of the land it comes from. Same in Scotland, same with Ireland. And that's a really interesting thing, when you see something, and how the human mind puts that into music, or puts it into poetry, or whatever."

Born in 1968, Duncan Chisholm grew up near Inverness and took up the fiddle at the age of eight under the teaching of Donald Riddell, whose pupils at the time included Bruce MacGregor of Blazin' Fiddles. Chisholm would go on to form Wolfstone in 1989. It's debatable how many albums they've actually released, due to sketchy contractual obligations for their American label, Green Linnet Records, but the general consensus sits around eight.

Several of those inspired glowing reviews and helped build a substantial following for the band, both in North America and Europe. But various changes in personnel and general fatigue came to a head in 1998 and they temporarily called it a day. Green Linnet, however, claimed they were owed one more album. Returning to the studio Wolfstone made the successful *Seven*, widely lauded as a critical comeback. As a result, the band continue to perform and record up to the present, albeit intermittently.

As a footnote to all this, Green Linnet was sold in 2006, amidst numerous royalty claims from its various artists, Wolfstone included.

Meanwhile, Chisholm dedicated his first solo album, *Redpoint* (1997), to his former teacher, Donald Riddell. Recorded by Phil Cunningham and featuring several members of Wolfstone, it received widespread plaudits for its sophis-

ticated fiddling. *The Door of Saints* (2001) followed. Inspired by Chisholm's trips to northern Spain, it further enhanced his growing reputation as a brilliant young composer. While the first release of his celebrated *Strathglass Trilogy* surfaced in 2008, the impact of these three discs is well documented in *Penguin Eggs* No. 62.

Gigging now and again with Wolfstone, touring both solo and with Julie Fowlis (see our cover feature), Chisholm also participates in various commissioned projects, including the hugely successful tribute *Bothy Culture And Beyond* to his friend, the late innovative piper and fiddler Martyn Bennett.

Pushed to declare his musical inspirations, Chisholm rabbits on about Shaun Davey's *The Brendan Voyage* and Billy Jackson's *The Wellpark Suite*. From the pop world, he name-checks Iceland's Sigur Ros. "They were quite a big influence when I was piecing together *Sandwood*," says he.

But then he starts in on film soundtracks.

"I love anything John Williams has ever done. Ennio Morricone, amazing! *Cinema Paradiso* is one of my favourites.

"As I move through my life, I'm constantly excited by the next project, the next opportunity that comes along. About travel, all the wonderful things that are gifted to you if you play music for a living. They keep coming. The important thing for me is that I'm able to tell people: 'This is who I am. This is where I'm from. This is it.' You couldn't ask for more than that, making your living, and making your way through life, and to have these opportunities. When you're able to fully say, 'Well, this is my music, this is what I believe in, this is the type of person I am', that is truly fulfilling."



Duncan Chisholm at Sandwood Bay





## Anna & Elizabeth

**This duo offers traditional folksongs updated with a variety of modern sounds.**

By J. Poet

On the cover of their new album, *The Invisible Comes To Us*, the images of Anna Roberts-Gevalt and Elizabeth LaPrelle are partially obscured by an overlay of digital circuitry that veils their extended hands. Roberts-Gevalt says they chose the image to represent the new direction the duo is pursuing.

Anna & Elizabeth are still singing traditional songs, but their arrangements are combining acoustic instruments with washes of ambient electronica, steel guitars, horns, drums, and percussion loops.

"Since we moved to Brooklyn, we've been meeting a lot of musicians who operate outside of the world of folk music," Roberts-Gevalt says. "In the last couple of years, I've been

moving in two directions at once. I've gotten deeper into the traditional world, playing with Elizabeth, and I've been composing experimental music for other projects.

"I've met players who are as passionate about improvisation, electronic music, free jazz, and quirky pop as I was about folk. That got me interested in marrying the two worlds. At first, it was hard combining things that I never combined before. It took a lot of practice. As I got deeper into the world of experimental music, I adopted their approach—making music without worrying so much about failing. As we worked on the arrangements of the folk songs we were going to put on this album, we tried to illustrate them in a sonic way that would immerse the audience in them."

To find the material on *Invisible*, the duo spent two and a half years combing through the archives in their home states of Vermont and Virginia. "You're listening to all this traditional music on digital files," Roberts-Gevalt says. "A lot of the recordings have the hiss of white noise on them. They were recorded on aluminum cylinders and, over time, they dete-

riorated. That sound correlated with the drone I was discovering in ambient electronic music. It gave me ideas about using sound to create an atmosphere for the songs."

On previous albums, most of the songs Anna & Elizabeth sang were from the Appalachian region. This time, they're mostly from New England.

"They're from the places I grew up in," Roberts-Gevalt explains. "Songs from people of English and Irish descent. They're from the 4,066 recordings of ballads made in the '40s by the folklorist Helen Flanders, mostly of people singing a cappella. I was inspired by the idea of delving into the tradition of the places I came from. I wanted to learn the songs my ancestors in New England would have heard 100 years ago."

After selecting more songs than they could ever fit onto an album, or a single performance, they began winnowing the material down at month-long residencies at the MacDowell Colony and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts.

"We brought along all the songs we found in



the archives and explored them. The songs we liked to keep singing made it onto the record.”

Roberts-Gevalt produced *The Invisible Comes To Us* with Benjamin Lazar Davis from Okkervil River and Cuddle Magic.

“We don’t think of this direction as going electric, and it’s not a rock album, but we wanted to incorporate the sounds of all the music we’re listening to—rock, electronic, and experimental—to present folk music in new ways. Ben and I shared the arranging duties, with one of us usually taking the lead. The idea to use horns on *Virginia Rambler* was more mine, but we co-wrote the horn arrangement. It was fun and scary. I’d never done anything like that before—making up melodies and counter melodies for instruments I’ve never played.

“*By the Shore* is about walking near the ocean, so we wanted deep sounds. [Pedal steel guitarist] Susan Alcorn is one of my all-time favourite musicians. Her playing changed my musical life, so it felt natural to bring her in. She helped us express the depth of the song and the sounds of the ocean. You’re always exploring the same songs in traditional music, so you want to find something that brings modern sounds to this old material.”

The experimental sounds never overwhelm the arrangements. The duo’s acoustic guitar and

banjo playing still take centre stage, along with the harmonies that are their trademark.

“We work on the harmonies, although there are some aspects we don’t think about anymore. We’ve been singing together for 11 years, so parts of it are less conscious, but every time we find a new song, we have a bit of trial and error: ‘Shall we sing higher or lower? Shall you sing lead or should I sing lead? Should the vocal be tense or more relaxed? All the songs we have on the record were learned from field recordings of one person singing alone. Some had no chords or rhythms, so what can we do to harmonize with it?’.”

Roberts-Gevalt says the music of their live shows is also evolving. “We’re incorporating a rotating cast of third musicians, so we can create a flow moving between songs. On our last English tour, we had a four-piece band. On a U.S. tour, we had Jarrett Gilgore play saxophone, synth, and drums.

“Right now, we’re putting together a show at a historic Shaker village in the Berkshires. We’re bringing along Sandy Silva, a percussive dancer who plays with La Boutine Souriante, cellist Paul Wiancko, and Susan Alcorn, a pedal steel player.

We’re also doing a special collaboration with Linda Buckley, a composer from Ireland,



for a space at Virginia Tech, with speakers all around, to create a surround sound environment. Buckley grew up on a farm in rural Ireland. Now she composes computer music. This piece is a sonic portrait of Texas Gladden, the singer from Smyth County, Virginia. We’re using film I made at the Gladden house and taking poetry she wrote and putting it to music and movement, trying to explore her memory and the experience of her home. Her granddaughter still lives in the house and she’s gonna sing with us.”

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## The Milk Carton Kids

**Championed by the likes of T Bone Burnett, they define the complete contemporary folk duo.**

**By Alan Kellogg**

It's a miserable, sodden Sunday afternoon in a comfy trailer back of the main stage at the Edmonton Folk Music Festival, the worst weather weekend in memory at the 38-year-old outdoor event. That said, The Milk Carton Kids—that is, Joey Ryan and Kenneth Pattengale—who will be the festival closers later on, are anything but stressed. They've played here several times before over their seven-year history, in one of their better markets, and have kind words for early-ish supporter, producer Terry Wickham.

"He's one of the good ones," avers Pattengale quietly as he strums a (Dmaj7?) chord, the opening to Jobim's *The Girl From Ipanema*, which they will not be playing that day. "And there aren't that many good ones."

Indeed, the duo—they formed in 2011 in Los Angeles and have gone on to top-ether Americana status—seem to affect a certain world-weariness at this point in conversation.

The last couple of years have had their challenges. Kenneth, who has moved to Nashville,

went through prostate cancer and the breakup of a long relationship, while Joey's family grew to four, with the potential commensurate anxiety additional parental responsibilities can spark. In several interviews, they expressed frustration with the vicissitudes of the music biz, which (ed. note) usually just indicates continued sanity, grey cells, and the existence of a beating heart.

And yet, here they are, back bigger (see below) and better (peruse the reviews) than ever, with a strong, resonant new album, *All the Things That I Did and All the Things That I Didn't Do*, and a touring band to support it.

As fans are coming to realize, this expanded approach represents a major departure for an act that has defined the complete contemporary folk duo. It also represents a plucky rolling of the dice, since carrying five more musicians becomes both a financial and artistic risk.

Some things, of course, happily remain unaltered. The trademarked onstage shtick between the two seems to be perfectly natural and while Joey seems to lead the proceedings in concert, Kenneth gives as good as he gets in close confines. When Joey revealed he gets his books on Audible and has been listening to pop science tomes like *From Eternity to Here*, his musical partner was hilariously, dryly unrelenting, barbs-wise.

On the other hand, was Kenneth having us on when he said he was reading the recent Paul

Simon biography? That same half of the S&G duo the Kids are compared to ad nauseam?

When I asked him if his recent brush with the big C had engendered a special sense of mortality in both of them, he replied, "I wouldn't say Joey has an acute sense of anything."

At interview time, the new touring band hadn't worked together many times.

Joey: "We haven't done much. Our main tour is in October and November (with Montreal's Barr Brothers). I think it's good. People get along really well. I'm looking forward to being in a bus with everybody and finding that groove you can only get into when you play five times a week. It begins to get boring when the learning curve drops off and it feels less exciting. But then you talk with someone at the end of the tour who actually saw you at the beginning and they tell you how much better it sounds. At that point, you realize the all the hard work has paid off."

The new album, produced by the estimable Joe Henry, was recorded at the The House of Blues' Sun Room in Nashville. Originally conceived by (Milk Carton Kids fan) T-Bone Burnett as a "millimeter-by-millimeter copy" of Sam Phillips's legendary Sun Studio in Memphis, the room was eventually changed—and at Burnett's behest, who wanted the ceiling raised by seven feet as a starter. Nor is it a strictly analogue operation.

"We recorded it as a hybrid," says Kenneth.





"We didn't record it to tape and used Pro-Tools as well." That said, it was almost entirely recorded live off the floor, as they say ("very few overdubs"—Joey) which meant things could get crowded in the small room. Kenneth: "A couple of days, there were 11 of us in there at the same time. I was happy when Joey left to buy groceries with his family."

As to producer and multi-threat talent Joe Henry, whose smart, perceptive essays have graced the notes to earlier Kids' albums, Joey's sardonic wit shuts off, replaced by heartfelt praise.

"The other albums were as a duo, so we didn't really need a producer. But when we brought in all these other musicians (from woodwinds to Hammond B3) it was time. He's been a mentor and close friend and confidant to me, both creatively and personally. He has done what so many try to do and go awry. In spite of travelling and his creativity, he has this tight-knot loving family. Both his kids are good and have left home. He made it."

We were talking on the anniversary of the Charlottesville march and murder. It's true that their music has always been reflective of the times, but politics?

Joey: "Well, it's hard to talk about it at the moment since we're such diehard Republicans. [Pause] Don't print that! They won't get it!"

I demur, confident of the global perspective and sense of humour of the elevated, progressive *Penguin Eggs* reader.

"Actually, I think about it all the time and it definitely creeps into my songwriting. But if you find it oblique, it's probably because for me the worst thing is a political song that comes across as a policy memo. That's why I try and deal more with what it's like living in these times. This has been an awakening for me that at least the voting populace...I just didn't realize we were capable of that outcome. I'd rather deal with it emotionally rather than in a more expository, pointed way. The best political songs come at it emotionally."

We'll leave it to others to expound on the manifold virtues of *The Things That I Did and All the Things I Didn't Do*, although I would urge you to sample the exquisite title track along with *Big Time* and *One More for the Road*. Getting these wry, self-effacing types to self-promote loudly is a mug's game.

Even so, there is clearly a quiet pride at work. Kenneth: "Well, pound for pound, as far as we're concerned, we find it the best writing we've done. We are fortunate that there are people out there who love a lot of our songs, and so far fans have responded to it well. As to the band, who knows? Maybe we will get back to the duo again. We'll have to see how things unfold..."

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## Anita Best & Sandy Morris

### Iconic Newfoundland musicians renew 50-year friendship with a tasteful new recording.

By Jean Hewson

Anita Best was born on Merasheen Island in 1948, one year before Newfoundland entered Confederation with Canada. Merasheen, a prosperous fishing community in Placentia Bay on Newfoundland's south coast, maintained the traditional lifestyle and rich culture of its English, Irish, and Scottish settlers.

When Best was a child, televisions were rare and people provided their own entertainment by congregating in one another's homes to share songs, stories, tunes, and the occasional dance.

In the late '50s, Joey Smallwood's controversial resettlement program was beginning to rear its ugly head and in 1958, Best's father

decided to move his family to St. John's in a pre-emptive strike to avoid forced relocation. It was a very different life, but it gave Best the opportunity to share her beautiful voice and unique repertoire of traditional songs with the burgeoning folk music scene in St. John's.

Best eventually started to perform with Sandy Morris, a St. John's-based guitarist conversant with many different styles and genres of music.

"Our first gig together was at our friend Carol's wedding in '68 or '69," says Best. "We played *In My Life* by The Beatles. We did family events, like people's weddings and parties — in the '70s, we were both involved with Figgy

Duff, and we used to play with them occasionally when Pamela Morgan wasn't available."

Morris, a prolific arranger and producer, has created music for many films and shows, including 24 seasons of CBC's *Land and Sea*. One of the province's top guitar accompanists, he has worked with everyone from Ron Hynes to Dame Vera Lynn. In addition to his ongoing work with Best, he performs with Jenny Gear, Jamie Dart, Erin Best, Spirit of Newfoundland, and guitar supergroup Fretboard Journey. He was a founding member of the seminal folk-rock group Wonderful Grand Band and has appeared as a sideman on countless recording





projects. At this point in Morris's career, it would be much easier to keep a tally of those he has not yet worked with.

Best was employed for many years as a teacher in rural Newfoundland and decided to change careers and pursue a master's degree in folklore in 1984. In 1985, she collaborated with three other women to produce an anthology entitled *Come and I Will Sing You*, a collection of lesser-known, previously unpublished Newfoundland songs. It remains, to this day, an important resource for local musicians and music educators.

She also performs in a duo with Pamela Morgan, lead singer of Figgy Duff. Their haunting album, *The Colour of Amber*, received Roots Traditional Recording of the Year at the East Coast Music Awards in 1993. A few years later, Best's solo CD, *Crosshanded* (named after the practice of fishing by oneself), eschewed all instrumental embellishment and focused on her abilities as an expert storyteller and unaccompanied singer. A classic recording, it brings the listener back to a time of harsh landscapes, hard work and simple pleasures.

Best received the Order of Canada in 2011, and both Best and Morris have received honorary doctorates from Memorial University for their outstanding contributions to the musical life of their home province.

Refusing to rest on their laurels, they recently embarked on a recording project, finally committing the fruits of their 50-year partnership to a CD named *Some Songs*. Released in April, it contains a mixture of traditional ballads in French, English, and Portuguese, as well as pieces penned by pre- and post-confederation songwriters. The songs encompass joy, tragedy, mirth, and loss, and are rendered with both respect for the tradition and a contemporary aesthetic.

The instrumental arrangements are tasteful and skillfully played, enhancing the emotional power of the lyrics without competing for space with Best's voice.

Morris's many musical influences find their way onto the album, giving the old stories a modern twist. "I like to make accompaniments for traditional songs that don't sound traditional," says Morris. "Our version of *Vive La Rose* was influenced by Nuno Bettencourt's guitar in *More Than Words*—not the chords but the groove. Some of the arrangements are a bit jazzy. It's all a part of who I am as a guitar player."

"I love singing unaccompanied because you can do whatever you like," adds Best. "You have more freedom when you're singing alone but Sandy has these fabulous arrangements and is a real mind-reader when we perform

together. No matter what I do, he's right there with me."

Best and Morris have busy schedules. Best is a volunteer at VOBB, the community radio station in Norris Point on the island's west coast. She also organizes a concert series in Rocky Harbour on Monday nights that features traditional songs and performers from the area.

Morris is co-owner of a business that produces tribute shows and is currently working on a concert featuring the music of Glenn Campbell.

Both are keen to tour and promote the album and are even talking about volume two.

"When we went into the studio, we recorded a pile of stuff," says Morris. "There were several tracks that didn't make it to this CD that might make it onto the next one."

The sleeve artwork for *Some Songs* is an image of a painting by Best's sister-in-law, Margaret Walsh Best. Charming yellow flowers sit on a table in blue glass vases, as light streams in from a nearby window.

"The painting is of a vase of ordinary flowers in an ordinary setting but the flowers are really beautiful," says Best. "For me, Newfoundland songs are like that; they seem ordinary, they're common, and you hear them every day—but when you look closely, you see the beauty at the heart of them."

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## Andrew Collins Trio

**Award-winning trio's instrumental skills reach a virtuosic level amidst humour and hard work.**

**By Mike Sadava**

Over the past two decades, Andrew Collins has become almost ubiquitous in Toronto's new acoustic/bluegrass scene.

Collins is renowned for his mandolin wizardry, starting in the late '90s with the newgrass/jazz-inflected Creaking Tree Quartet, but also including projects such as the Foggy Hogtown

Boys, Annie Lou, and currently his own trio, which until the last album was totally instrumental. He is also in demand as a producer for bands such as the Lonesome Ace Stringband, the Unseen Strangers, and indie rocker Elana McMurtry.

But with the trio's new double album, *Tongue and Groove*, Collins has really found his voice. *Tongue* is totally vocal tunes, while *Groove* is a collection of instrumentals, mostly composed by Collins. Complete with slick harmonies, the trio covers everything from the jazz standard *Just A Gigolo* to Nick Drake's *Cello Song* to the old Hollies chestnut *King Midas in Reverse*.

"One-third of our live show is vocal tunes, and at set breaks people would ask what album

has the vocal material. We had nothing to give them. The original concept was to do just vocal covers, but as the time for recording was approaching I said we're known as an instrumental group, so I got writing."

Collins has also contributed a few songs of his own to *Tongue*, including a bouncy swing tune, *I Drink Whiskey and My Gal Drinks Wine*, and his own take on *Long Black Veil*.

While Collins is a very serious musician, with dozens of complex, intricate compositions under his belt, he feels that part of the mandate of the trio is to be entertaining as well as enlightening. That includes throwing a little humour into the mix, and hence the inclusion of two Roger Miller songs on this recording.



Collins, who says he has a struggle with songwriting as opposed to instrumental composition, marvels at Miller's prowess with words. "He never wasted a word. He was super-economical in his songwriting, so every word says a lot. Very few words give a huge picture."

But make no mistake, Collins's playing, always virtuosic, has hit a new level, especially with his tone, a subtle but vital part of high-level mandolin playing. Getting the fullest, woodiest sound out of a small instrument is an art in itself, and one that not all players achieve. He credits being part of the trio for this result, especially the light and subtle playing of guitarist Mike Mezzatesta, which has inspired him to work harder on his technique and approach the instrument with a lighter touch.

"There was a time when I wasn't practising mandolin as much as I had, maybe a little burned out," Collins says. "But a few years ago my passion was re-ignited... I've been practising more in the last few years than I had in the past 10 years."

As much as he is in demand in the Toronto new acoustic and bluegrass scene, Collins is putting most of his energy, and just about all of his touring plans, into the trio. He knew from the start he had a magic combination as soon as they found one another.

"From our first long tour to Australia, the growth of the unit became palpable. I never wanted to be a band leader, but the interplay between the three of us has gotten so tight... It becomes this entity where the sum is greater than the parts. We know each other's playing so well. The material is challenging, but it becomes easy; you don't have to think."

The trio is partly the result of a friendly musician swap with another Toronto acoustic band, The Unseen Strangers, whose albums Collins has produced. The Strangers gave the OK to Mezzatesta playing with Collins, and he gave his blessing to bassist James McEleney playing with the Strangers.

Collins was somewhat of a late bloomer, not picking up the mandolin until he was 23, which is just about half of his life. He was living in Whistler, BC, being a high-level skier, which he credits as a stepping stone to music because of the effort he put into it. He had seen David Grisman in concert a few years earlier, and was blown away with mandolin for the first time. When he finally did buy an entry-level mandolin one summer, he couldn't put it down, and was practising eight hours a day. When winter came, he realized that he was getting the same charge out of the mandolin that he got from skiing, and he could do it all year round.

"After six months of working on the mandolin I knew I would do it for the rest of my life." The Grisman influence basically got into his genes. From early on, he learned the master mandolinist's tunes and borrowed his riffs, and that bug has never left. In fact, the final track on the *Groove* disc, one of the few he didn't compose, is Grisman's *Dawg Grass*.

He moved to Vancouver, teamed up with banjo player Jayme Stone, who has also carved out a great career, and they busked every day at the Granville Market. Eventually he moved back to Toronto, which had more of a burgeoning acoustic scene, getting together with his old high-school buddy Chris Coole and other players and scoring a regular Wednesday night gig at the Silver Dollar as bluegrass became popular with *O Brother Where Art Thou?*

While his playing progressed quickly with all the practice, busking, and gigging, he still had doubts whether he could be a full-time professional musician. "During my first year, I still wondered whether it was a stupid thing to do because I was starting so late. But then I was told that Wes Montgomery started in his late 20s." (The late jazz guitarist's official bio says he started when he was 19, still relatively late).

But Collins is living proof that it's never too late to start, as long as you're willing to put the work in. And keep working at it.

# eric lindell

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## Fatoumata Diawara

**She fled Mali to sing alongside the likes of Paul McCartney and Herbie Hancock.**

**By Roger Levesque**

**I**t's hard not to be impressed with the beauty and wonder of Fatoumata Diawara and her music, especially once you've met the singer, guitarist, and actor in person and watched her perform.

You could almost forget that she writes songs about very serious, even tragic aspects of life on the African continent. But beauty is simply her means to an end, to getting the message out.

Since her initial forays into music and film and wider international touring, Diawara's vision of the world has only grown more expansive so it's no surprise that the recent

release of her second full-length solo album *Fenfo* (translation: *Something To Say*) embraces a wider audience and issues.

"Everything is about love and sharing in the beginning, about life's truth," she explains, "And in music we need all those elements. When I write songs I'm really alone. I like to listen to myself and my band and try to forgive myself, to find a kind of hope. I could just complain and cry and share my pain in a bad way, but I'm trying to share my story, my background. I'm trying to connect to others in that same situation, to help women or children who want to change their own lives in a positive way, with love."

Diawara writes romantic love songs, too, but there's real depth even to these tunes. For instance, *Fenfo*'s opening track and first video-single, the gently unfolding *Nterini* (*My Love*), is a tune about the heartache of separated lovers in a world of refugees.

She calls herself "a survivor" for some of the

challenges she faced as a young woman.

"I wanted to address this subject because it's about what's going on today, not only in Africa but all over the world. I'm lucky to be able to travel as I want and it's important for me to be free to share my life. But it's painful to see how many people are not able to do that, because I'm a migrant, too."

She's very conscious of how leaving her family and West Africa altered her life.

"It's just a small part of my story but I ran away from my family when I was 19 years old and that changed everything. That makes me a free woman today, and the world—humanity—needs migration. The human being needs to move, to go and get more experience and to take that home. The young in Africa need that today because you cannot learn everything at school. And we can all be more tolerant. We are all nomads."

Born of Malian parents in neighbouring Ivory Coast, Diawara was a rebellious child. After



early training in her father's dance troupe, he sent the 12-year-old to live with her actress aunt in Mali's capital, Bamako, and before long she was drafted to work in film, fatefully speaking one line at the end of a movie titled *The Power Of Women*. Then 17-year-old Diawara was cast in her first lead role, as a real-life female hero in the bio-pic *Sia*, and life imitated art to make her a star across West Africa.

When an offer to tour internationally with a French theatre company collided with her family's plan for an arranged marriage, Diawara evaded police to sneak out of Mali on a plane bound for Paris. Continuing a career in theatre, film, and music, she sang in nightclubs, backed singer/mentors such as Oumou Sangare and Dee Dee Bridgewater, and recorded with the likes of Damon Albarn and Herbie Hancock, even before Nick Gold signed her to his World Circuit label to make her 2011 debut, *Fatou*.

Since then she's gone on to play New York's Carnegie Hall, England's Glastonbury Festival, and countless shows on several continents, even winding up onstage next to Paul McCartney in Albarn's African Express. Along the way she sang with Cuba's Roberto Fonseca on the disc *At Home Live*.

Now 36, she shares a son with her Italian husband and splits her time between Italy, Paris, and Mali when she's not touring the globe.

Philosophically, Diawara is situated somewhere between the ancient and the future. The song *Kokoro (Ancestral Heritage)* questions Africans who set aside their roots to follow western values and fashions, while *Kanou Dan Ye (Stop Loving)* encourages newlyweds who marry outside of their tribe. *Ou Yan Ye (They've Seen Us)* asks people to avoid jealousy and follow their destiny, and *Bonya (Respect)* is a simple song about showing respect for others.

The sonic backdrops behind the tunes have also evolved beyond the largely acoustic feel of 2011's *Fatou* to feature sharp electric guitar next to African strings from the kora and kamel ngoni, set drums alongside traditional percussion, and chief collaborator Matthieu Chedid (a.k.a. M) on organ, with guest cellist Vincent Segal, among others. Tracks such as *Negue Negue (Let's Have Fun)* take an infectious dance groove complete with rubbery, funk baselines, while the opening 4/4 beat of *Bonya* is as close as Diawara gets to a rocker before it's fleshed out with more embellishments.

"My compositions and vocals have both changed a lot on the second album. The vocal technique is still traditional singing in Wassoulou but I wanted more nuance. In the compositions, you can hear the sound is more open to rock or blues or funk or Afrobeat because of my collaborations. Most of the time onstage it's more rock'n'roll, putting one foot in the tradition and one foot really international in rock, jazz, pop, and modern music."

An electronic angle creeps in, too, at points, thanks to the influence of her producer M.

"I'm more organic with my guitar, but he told me, 'Let's try something in electronics,' and I said OK. In the end, I really like it and people appreciate it, too."

In the end, Diawara's music serves her message well.

"I was fighting about how much to say, because sometimes I'm very angry about what's going on in this world. I'm really an ambassador for women and children but especially for children. When I look at my son, I think, 'What's tomorrow going to bring for this little boy?' and I watched the TV and I was crying everyday. It's the darkness of this crazy world taking all the positive energy. We need a light and I want to use my music as a light. You know, in Africa, music is made to heal people. Light and love can be our positive vision for the future."



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## Jon Brooks

**His songs deal with political topics, ripped from news headlines, that few dare to touch.**

**By Jason Schneider**

Fans of Toronto singer/songwriter Jon Brooks will already know that he doesn't make a new record without a specific theme in mind. His new album, *No One Travels Alone* (Borealis Records), is no different, although its theme is perhaps more wide-ranging than anything Brooks has done before.

To be more specific, Brooks begins each project by asking the same question: what is the current central tension of our times? Clearly, the list of potential answers at this moment is long, and Brooks couldn't limit it to a single issue. Instead, he began writing about the global refugee crisis that has resulted in upwards of 65 million displaced souls, as well as the global

environmental crisis that affects us all.

It's not much of a stretch to find connections between the two, and as the songs took shape, Brooks endeavored to go a step farther and have the actual songs connect to one another.

"I used a poetic device called 'corona,' wherein the last lines of the first song become the first lines of the second song, and so on," he explains. "The final line of the album is also the first line, and the circle is completed, thus, the 'corona' or 'crown'. The poet John Donne borrowed and popularized this form from his Elizabethan contemporaries."

Brook adds, "Needless to say, the writing process for this album was arduous and mathematical—it took three years to complete. I thought I was done and ready to record it in early 2017. However, an epileptic seizure while on tour in the American Midwest in late February of that year dislocated both my shoulders and did severe nerve damage to my right leg. I had to cancel almost a year's worth of gigs and was relegated to the couch and Percocets for about four months. But, as with all calamitous life experience, the down time yielded much new

inspiration and I ended up rewriting about 70 per cent of the album on the couch during the winter and spring of 2017."

Those results reinforce the album's message of our essential interconnectedness and that, indeed, no one travels alone in our universe. The album juxtaposes this notion with the opening track, *01*, based on how our world has increasingly become binary/non-binary in both a digital sense and how we view ourselves; and the song *Gulfport, MS*, which tells the story of an elderly Hurricane Katrina victim who would not have survived without the aid of anonymous rescuers.

On a lighter note, there is *The Wow! Signal*, which takes us back to Aug. 16, 1977, the day Elvis Presley died but also the day the Search for Extra Terrestrial Intelligence project at Ohio State University reportedly received a radio transmission from 17.5 thousand light years away.

But for Brooks, the intent behind *No One Travels Alone* is best summed up by *Song Of The Mournful World*, a plea to re-examine the very nature of human existence.



"I wanted this song to be just as challenging musically as the questions it asks," he says. "I love how many of the songs on this album play with traditional song structures. Part of our job in the digital age of songwriting is to constantly surprise our audiences."

In keeping with that idea, Brooks adhered to a vision of making *No One Travels Alone* his most musically diverse album to date. Along with a combination of eastern and western musical styles, he sought to incorporate more electric guitars, Hammond organ, and piano than on his recent previous albums, creating what ended up as a collision of sounds that reflected the migratory lyrical themes.

Brooks achieved this through the help of Aurickshaw's Ed Hanley, who provided much of the drone, with guitar primarily handled by old friend Neil Cruickshank of the Vancouver band Brickhouse. The album's producer Alec Fraser, also handled bass duties, while renowned fiddler John Showman added his distinctive flair.

"I am very grateful and lucky to have such massive musical souls willing to help me in my humble endeavours," Brooks says. "I don't believe in crowd-funding albums in a socialist democracy, which means I'm always working with very low budgets. The generosity of people like Alec, John, Neil, Ed, and Peter J.

Moore, who mastered the recording, cannot be overstated. Not only does *No One Travel Alone*, no one succeeds in music alone."

With six albums now to his credit, Brooks has certainly made up for what many would consider a late start to his musical career, having released his debut in 2005 at age 37. The gift of experience has set him apart from his contemporaries, as his albums have deliberately avoided youthful navel gazing in favour of song cycles dealing with war stories, murder ballads, and political topics ripped from the headlines that most singer/songwriters wouldn't dare touch.

It's led to a slew of accolades, including multiple Canadian Folk Music Award nominations, a Kerrville (Texas) Folk Festival "New Folk Award," and the lyrics to his third album, *Moth Nor Rust*, being published in Canada's prestigious literary journal *Exile Quarterly*.

Although Brooks had made attempts at songwriting as a young man growing up north of Toronto in King City, he points to seeing a Bruce Springsteen solo show at Massey Hall as his epiphany.

"Being at that performance really galvanized my love of first-person narrative balladry," he says.

"But like painters at the time when the



camera first appeared, songwriters today are now at liberty to explore less linear and more urgently emotional stories. I now see myself as a collector and redistributor of emotional data. I'm interested in finding the pulse of the soul of the times, and in order to accomplish that, I have to read, read, read, and interview people who are directly affected by that pulse. To me, sharing that emotional data is something songs can do that the Internet can't.

"Throughout my six albums, I've avoided recording anything that causes me great shame—or uncomely pride. That is to say, I'm equally devastated and satisfied with the whole of *No One Travels Alone*."



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## Eliza Gilkyson

**From a heart-wrenching tragedy to the spell of a supermoon, her new songs prove emotional.**

**By Jackie Bell**

**T**wo-time Grammy-nominated singer/songwriter Eliza Gilkyson drew on her musicality, spirituality, and poetry to create her 20th album, *Secularia*.

This powerful collection of secular hymns explores deeply personal territory while commenting on the precarious state of humankind. Gilkyson wraps hard questions in beautiful music as she unapologetically exposes truths both ugly and beautiful.

Gilkyson began work on this project in early 2017, although the ideas behind it percolated for years. “I have been reactive to religious ideology and angered by the efforts on the right in the U.S.A. to rationalize immoral action with out-of-context biblical references,” Gilkyson says. She believes the notion of God-as-male has resulted in the sublimation of women

and has, in fact, caused harm to the earth. In *Secularia*, she grieves societal, cultural, and ecological losses.

At the same time, Gilkyson thinks of herself as a seeker, “someone enamoured with the mysteries of existence, what it means to be human in this world and what our ethical responsibilities are at this juncture in human history.” She wants to convey her gratitude “to an unseen force about which we understand so little, to witness the beauty of creation.”

In so doing, she found she needed to reject the constraints of traditional religion without throwing the baby out with the bath water. “The baby,” she explains, “being the mystery, the beauty, the awesomeness, the decency, the communal potential of human experience.”

The collection begins with *Solitary Singer*, a poem written in 1949 by her grandmother, Phoebe Hunter Gilkyson. Her father, Terry Gilkyson, put the song to music in the early ’50s and used it as the theme song for his Armed Forces Network folk radio show. Cisco Ryder, Gilkyson’s son and producer, insisted on this song as the album opener because it “set the stage for this musical journey in a stripped-

down, raw, and pure setting.”

A mournful pedal steel guitar introduces *Lifelines*, a song that describes the collapse of current societal structures: “*Order falls apart / Nothing is as it seems / And all of the like-minds / Who reel from this blow to the heart / Turn to each other / On the night of the Supermoon.*”

Reference to the supermoon is recent and specific. “When Trump was elected...it was like you could look far into the future and see everything that has now come to pass. And there was this supermoon hanging over us that entire week—it was otherworldly and added to this sense of impending disaster and downright fear. I kept imagining people all over the country under this moon...gearing up to fight, to resist. I saw us as having these lifelines between us to keep each other going.”

Gilkyson does not offer false hope or pat solutions. “We are on the edge of an abyss and could fall either way,” she says. “I think it’s too late for a soft landing...how will we behave when we have to live with much less, when capitalism plays out its final exhaustive endgame?” She continues, “I’m not even sure



our brains are equipped to contemplate the 'at worst' we are confronting, but I think we have a better shot at managing it if we begin to consider where we really are in the timeline of history."

The song *Seculare* is a stripped-down prayer of thanks accompanied only by guitar and voice. Gilkyson's daughter, Delia Castillo, and friend, Adrienne Pedrotti, cut their improvised background vocals separately, although one would never know it.

"What you hear on the recording was the happy accident that came from joining the two voices together later when we had time to listen back. That's one of the synchronistic rewards of recording," says Gilkyson.

*Reunion* is a beautiful song about a heart-wrenching reality. Twenty-six Nigerian teenage girls drowned in the Mediterranean Sea when their flimsy raft sank. "They were departing for Spain from Libya, a common leaving point for slave traders and refugees. They were the age of my granddaughter. They deserved to be named." Chris Maresh paid tribute to these girls with a gorgeous string arrangement, played on the album by the Tosca String Quartet.

Gilkyson comments on the juxtaposition of *Seculare* and *Reunion*, and their respective top-

ics of gratitude and horror. "It is a paradox that we could find so much to be grateful for when there is so much we grieve for at the same time. I am incredibly fortunate to be white and middle class with a roof over my head and beauty around me. I feel I have obligations as a result—first, to bear witness and be damn grateful for everything in my life, and then to acknowledge that there are others who are in desperate and dire circumstances all over the world who will never have what I have."

The musicians on *Secularia* were culled from a stellar group of Austin, TX, talent, including Chris Maresh (bass), Andre Moran (guitar), and Mike Hardwick (guitar and Dobro). The album features duets with Shawn Colvin, Pastor Sam Butler, and a particularly poignant version of *Down by the Riverside* with the late Jimmy LaFave.

Gilkyson and Ryder worked on the songs for 18 months before asking anyone else to work on it. "This project was built from the ground up," she says. "We have an incredible pool of players in Austin so we didn't have to go far to find them, and most have played on my other records. We know what to expect from them, the kind of sounds they'll give us, though they always surprise us with their own take and direction. There is a lot of discovery as we go



along with these players, but we start out solo, just me and the instrument, and try to follow the illusive magical thread from there."

Five generations of Gilkyson's family are represented on the recording: grandmother, father, son, daughter, and granddaughter.

"I am proud of the family lineage that informs my music," Gilkyson says. There's no doubt both music and poetry have been successfully passed through the generations.

With that kind of background, it's no surprise that Gilkyson has been inducted into the Texas Songwriters Hall of Fame.

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## Mick Flannery

**He sings about Ireland's underbelly and its hard drinkers. He also spins hilarious yarns.**

By Levi Gogeria

It's suppertime, 6:45 on a Wednesday night, and Festival Place at Sherwood Park, AB, basks in the mid-summer heat. Cut from the same uniquely weathered cloth as Tom Waits and Charles Bukowski, Blarney songwriter Mick Flannery is soft-spoken and sits in cool resignation as we pass around a boot flask of whisky and flip over an old Kris Kristofferson LP, mulling over the tracklist and a couple of Canadian beers.

"You'd have to wonder what came first, the woman or the song... Attractive people like that," Flannery says, pointing at Kristofferson, "can get into a lot of mess in their lives, because of the fact they're so attractive—you wonder...is more inspiration available to him because he's hot, or was he just inspired and happened to be hot, too?"

He often has "misery" for sale before or after

gigs. Though he's a master-class stone mason, he makes much of his living touring and telling stories. His songs are about gamblers and hard-drinking men, the city's seedy underbelly, its circuses, theatrics, politics, and romances. There are failed relationship songs, philosophical songs, humorous songs, bleak songs, and humorously bleak songs across the singer's five albums.

"I like anyone who's good at sparking imagery with dialogue. The simple conversational things that mean more than just the face of it," Flannery says. "That's very useful for songwriters: you only have a small amount of time to get through your story and get your message across."

Flannery uses spoken dialogue through character interactions in his stories. He's introspective and speaks of experiences rooted in human nature. Flannery is often compared to Tom Waits, a comparison inspired by both men's wisdom far beyond their ages, and their early piano-driven character sketches and introspective pieces.

"I was always trying to be older than I was... whereas, I think people in their 20s, especially their younger 20s, find life exciting and kind

of unified in the external experiences they're having. There's still a lot of possibilities," Flannery says.

Touring off his recent album, *I Own You*, has Flannery moving away from the introspective and romantic catalogue. He doesn't see himself as much of an individual anymore. In your 30s, he says, your ego really takes a dip. His vocal delivery is raw, the lyrics purposeful in its message. *I Own You* shows Flannery is as much into social commentary as he is character development.

"I've got a good few songs since then. I toyed with a concept album about a failed musician, now I'm writing songs that don't really fit into that so I'm backtracking a bit. I co-wrote a bunch of things over the last little while; one of them is a West Coast pop song that I'm terrified of releasing. It's joyful..."

Flannery isn't known for his happy songs. Or pop songwriting. His music hasn't really focused on chorus writing and he's torn about not being repressed and just doing it.

"I don't really write choruses; this song has a chorus and repeats a couple of lines over and over, which I don't tend to do—because I want the song to go somewhere. If there's a verse/



chorus I usually tend to change the lyrics as the song goes on, otherwise I feel like we've contrived the thing."

There are people who write choruses just right. Flannery's been toying with the idea, for a while he says, while cracking another few beers. "Some people are better at writing choruses. Like John Prine—choruses you can slide in and out of songs and they'll still make sense and they'll still be entertaining," Flannery says.

Flannery has had only one day off in the last few weeks of touring. He's a workhorse, and likes to be on the road. If he would take a day off he'd likely have something moderately healthy to eat, then hit a dive bar.

"I use alcohol a lot, I use it to play—it kills my nerves. I use it to kind of disappear a little but I find sometimes the hangover can put you into a weird mental state. I mean, it's always been useful because I don't know myself when I'm hungover, nervous, and jittery. Coming out of that, when you see the day's just starting to be brighter and you can see the future again, that feeling can really be creative."

Drinking has always been a powerful catalyst for artistic ambition, and plays some part in Flannery's creative output. As depressing as some of his songs sound, Flannery was never depressed or relied solely on the bottle as cre-

ative muse, or crutch. "Often I feel that it's getting ahead of me; addiction has a tendency to do that to you, like I have an addiction to cigarettes. But then Dylan kept going, Cohen kept going—drinking and smoking," Flannery says. "But moderation is probably a good thing. If you feel like you're going too far, moderation might be a good thing to try—you gotta stay alive."

Flannery loves travelling abroad, peddling his unique brand of misery, but people often miss his funnier side. Between scattered tales of failed relationships and ruin, he still knows how to make a crowd laugh.

"I grew from the south of Ireland, a place called Blarney. It's a tourist town where we have a magic castle, and we have the blarney stone atop our magic castle... Legend goes you kiss the stone and you get magic. It's a crock of shit, but it works. There are busloads of American people every day who come to kiss the stone... I gotta ask anyone who wants to kiss the stone to imagine there is a little kid growing up in a tourist town with a magic castle, and a magic stone, and busloads of Americans coming every day. You're 12 or 13 years old and there's not much to do in the town. One of those evenings, one of your friends might turn to you and say, 'What are we doing tonight?'"



And another might say, 'Let's go piss on the stone'."

Flannery's music can be a strong reminder of the pain and progress of the day-to-day toils of life, but behind it all he hopes to remind himself, and maybe others, that were all quite similar, and we're maybe not as bad as we seem.

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## L'Orchestre Pic-bois

**The musical waters they navigate include farmers jazz and funklore, all on stringed instruments.**

**By Marc Bolduc**

**L'**Orchestre Pic-bois (Woodpecker Orchestra), a relatively new Québécois folk band, quietly released its first CD last May in Joliette.

On the bright, yellow cover of the album appears a woodpecker with a red hoopoe, standing in an astronaut suit on what seems to be a new planet, holding a banjo in one hand and pointing to a mysterious point in space with the other.

That image, beautifully illustrated by Mathilde Cinq-Mars, sets the general tone of this album: a folklore sitting on a solid base of tradition, that doesn't hesitate to look far off, neither to explore new musical planets.

That stance could have been pompous if it had not been from seasoned musicians; even if this album is their first together, the group is composed from young veterans in Nicolas Babineau (Babineau-Chartrand), Hugo Blouin (MAZ), Jean Desrochers (Rivière Rouge) and Jean-Philippe Kiernan (Tu m'en diras tant) coming from different musical horizons with Québec's folklore as point of reference.

L'Orchestre Pic-bois got its name from different inspirations. According to Jean Desrochers, the band wanted to show the musical character of the group by putting forward the emphasis around plucked or picked string instruments (banjo, bass, guitar, and mandolin) even if fiddle, jaw's harp, or harmonica have an important part in the final work.

Also, like the bird that inspired the name of the band, they have a good part of percussion, especially when feet-taping comes along. As for the term orchestra, as ensemble, was chosen in part to avoid confusion with other existing groups, but also as an homage to the record-

ing pioneers of Québec folklore music, who weren't shy of bearing that name.

The terminology used for this band is clearly not innocent as L'Orchestre Pic-bois likes to work as a collective (which is another meaning of ensemble in French), not only to get each member's vision or experience but to create something new from those individual experiences put altogether.

This approach, based on the importance of multiple point of view, represents probably the band's best asset since it permits the exploration of many musical styles present in the North American folk landscape. Making a hockey analogy to explain the chemistry of the band, Jean Desrochers compares the ambiance within the group as something close to the one in the locker room after a game: a unique bond between the members and a sense of complicity for everyone involved.

That complicity was a major element into bringing the initial project to its completion: from the first steps, from selecting the reper-





when the bass starts to reel, or when harmonica or saw come along, it becomes a whole new territory and, therefore, unclassifiable.

As for the album itself, *L'Orchestre Pic-bois* contains 12 tracks showing an even distribution between songs and tunes (six each). The songs, interpreted within each singer's vocal boundaries, go from ancient repertoire to mid-20th century pop folk, all presented with a touch of humor.

Three of those songs focus on people's misfortunes: with *Sans logement* (Daniel Racine) they present the conditions of being homeless and *Pas loin là-bas*, played in an Appalachian bluegrass style, is about the misadventures of a guy who tries vainly to get out of bad luck, and *Je bois du Gingotte* (written by Gérald Côté) tells all about the difficulties in attending a party for people who don't belong there.

On a lighter side, *Charretier* (from Daniel Perron's repertoire) is a *chanson de mensonges* (literally a song of lies, in which every verse tells a lie, making the story a total nonsense) and *Belle Rose* makes an analogy between a secret chapel and lovemaking (!!!).

As for *Des taxes, des taxes* from Oscar Thifault, it echoes the contemporary laments of tax payers. On the music side, *L'Orchestre Pic-bois* revisits some traditional Québécois classics. On the first track, their take on the *Casse-Reel* (Aimé Gagnon) and *The Brandy* (Ozaname Chouinard) is powerful, respecting the music lines of the original versions, with improvisation on the melodies, which bring them to a more contemporary meaning.

The same process goes for *La suite Grand-maison*, which presents inspired versions of *Gigue des Gandmaison* (Ferdinand Dionne) and *La Ronfleuse* (Thomas Pomerleau), much to our delight.

Even if it is based on the respect of tradition, *L'Orchestre Pic-bois* also presents its own lovely compositions, mostly by Jean-Phillipe Kiernan (*Reel du p'tit muret*, *Reel Ataboy*, and *Reel des Prairies*) and Jean Desrochers (*Reel autrichien*, *La marche aux Dalles*, *Gigue de l'explorateur* or the *Valse du Manneken triste*), the last one in honour of the Brussels shooting victims.

All in all, *L'Orchestre Pic-bois* offers a different proposal about the way traditional Québec music is presented. Without ever losing sight of what makes the core of the style, it ventures into many zones unfamiliar to the Québécois music fan. This album reunites all the ingredients to attract traditional music lovers, especially those who are delighted by the perspective of exploring new ways of interpretation.

toire or making the arrangements to the last as funding, producing (Nicolas Babineau), or the making the graphic design (Hugo Blouin), every member had a say in the final result.

Musically speaking, it is tough to put a precise label on what the *L'Orchestre Pic-bois* provides since each track offers something different. In some ways, that exercise could seem meaningless because, as Jean Desrochers says, their vision is all about playing authentic music (starting with sources, transmitted or from collections) and to give it a roots twist without being afraid to bring the tunes a little bit farther.

As an example, *L'Orchestre Pic-bois* doesn't shy away from jazz d'habitants (farmers jazz), an expression coined by Normand Miron (*Le bruit court dans la ville*) to illustrate that grooving folklore that uses jazz accents, but the band is also comfortable with country music or even funklore qualifiers since they navigate, all the time, in different musical waters.

For Hugo Blouin, the main instruments used by the band could also recall bluegrass, but






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## Steve Dawson

**An old ally inspires a new recording that opens up infinite possibilities for roots music.**

**By Tony Montague**

**T**he instrumental album *Lucky Hand* is unlike anything Steve Dawson has recorded in his multi-faceted career as master of rock and roots guitars, song crafter, and award-winning producer. On his eighth solo release for his own Black Hen Music label, Dawson features a string quartet—used not to accompany or embellish his guitar but given rein to express its own distinctive and progressive character.

The quartet's leader is Dawson's former artistic partner Jesse Zubot. But don't expect a return to the 'strang' music of their duo as

Zubot & Dawson. The collaboration on *Lucky Hand* presents a bold new sound, and though it's Dawson's album Zubot is an equal creative force on the five tracks with strings. What was the source for this fresh approach?

"I'd been doing a lot of solo shows since my previous instrumental album, *Rattlesnake Cage*, came out in 2014—sometimes with a band and sometimes on my own, when I play a lot finger-style guitar," says Dawson. "I was looking on that music and creating new stuff, but I didn't want another solo record or to do it with a band. It's really hard for the musicians to translate finger-style guitar, as everything else kind of gets in the way of the intricacies."

Dawson turned to the music of multi-instrumentalist Van Dyke Parks, who worked with Brian Wilson and The Beach Boys in the late '60s and became a friend of Dawson's through fellow singer and songwriter Suzie Ungerleider, better known as Oh Susanna. After

hearing one of her songs on the radio in L.A. where he lives, Parks wanted to work with her, and the opportunity eventually came with one of Dawson's milestone projects, the Mississippi Sheiks tribute album *Things About Coming My Way* (2009).

"I got Suzie and Van Dyke together to do a song, so he arranged a string quartet for her. That summer, he came up for some more shows with us at festivals, and also did his own set with me backing him up, which I consider one of my career highlights. We've kept in touch.

"I was mainly inspired by what he did as a producer with Ry Cooder's first record, and also with Phil Ochs's *Greatest Hits*. Partway through every song these really adventurous string arrangements come in. Those were the signposts for what I thought would be a cool idea, playing guitar along the lines of the American primitive style started by John



Fahey, who in turn—like me—was influenced by people such as Doc Watson, Skip James, and Chet Atkins.”

Dawson, too, wanted strikingly original arrangements. “I wasn’t after a guitar record with string parts that were normal and boring. I wanted them to be cinematic and adventurous, to take it out of the straight-up Americana realm to a degree, and have personality—so they weren’t passive and supportive but more of a feature. I thought it would be cool to have a string quartet. And I wanted it to be exciting and weird.”

Enter Jesse Zubot who, since the days of the duo, has forged an international name for himself as a fearlessly ‘out-there’ jazz and new music violinist, working with Tanya Tagaq and many other artists, as well as producing for his own Drip Feed Audio label.

“I contacted Jesse to see if he would be interested in arranging. He and I hadn’t really worked together for quite some time, and this is totally different from how we used to work as Zubot & Dawson, which was more of a band situation where each of us would bring in tunes and then arrange them together.”

Dawson wrote all the pieces for *Lucky Hand* in their entirety—named for places within a couple of hundred miles of his Nashville

home—then sent the music to Zubot to create arrangements.

“I had very little to do with that part of it. I made a few suggestions along the way and we changed a few things but basically he just went to town. We recorded it live off the floor, with me and the strings in the same room. It was really a fun process.

“I think we both found this way of working to be refreshing. I haven’t thought about it too much, but back in the day when we were doing Zubot & Dawson stuff we started going in different directions, and it got to be harder to find middle ground. Since then, each of us has continued in that way. I just wanted him to feel as creative. In Zubot & Dawson, things fitted into a rootsy kind of realm, and I don’t think he was comfortable with that near the end. This was more, ‘Do what you do, I don’t mind how crazy you want to make it’. Out of 15 songs sent, he picked five, and I just turned him loose on them.”

Other than *Bentonia Blues*, a duet with Nashville-based harmonica legend Charlie McCoy, the recording was done in Vancouver. In addition to Zubot, the quartet is comprised of his sibling and fellow violinist Josh Zubot, progressive jazz and new-music cellist Peggy Lee, and classically trained viola player John

Kastelic.

“The stuff Jesse writes is very nuanced, so it doesn’t work that well with a straight-ahead classical player. But it turned out great—John’s a guy who can read really well but could understand the nuances of what Jesse wanted. We overdubbed some other instruments—textural things like some French horn, trombone, and clarinet. Other than that, it was all done with me facing the string quartet. And sweating bullets.

“Though there’s some improvising—certain sections where I’m just by myself and free to play however I want—maybe 95 per cent has to be as written, or everything’s going to fall apart. It’s not like they were sitting there glaring at me, making sure I didn’t screw up, but I felt that pressure. I worked on it pretty hard and got it down to the point where I could pull it off. Usually things are looser, and I like them being loose. But it was actually cool and curiously freeing to know I had to really have this arrangement down as it was supposed to be. So it was good for the brain.”

*Lucky Hand* may have been nerve-racking at times to record, but the reward for Dawson is a uniquely evocative, vital, and beautiful album that takes North American roots music into new territories.





# Gaeldom Calling

A close-up portrait of Julie Fowlis, a woman with long, dark, wavy hair, smiling gently at the camera. She is wearing a dark, patterned top. The background is a soft-focus image of white flowers with some reddish-brown petals, possibly cherry blossoms.

From singing on an Oscar-winning animated film, collaborating with the likes of Mary Chapin Carpenter, and making exquisite solo recordings, **Julie Fowlis** has become a high-profile torchbearer for Scots Gaelic. Words by **Colin Irwin**.



Julie Fowles is getting excited. It seems she always gets excited when she talks about Runrig, the Celtic folk-rock band who originally brought Gaelic language music into the mainstream, setting a precedent that has partly inspired Julie herself to run with and achieve great things over the last decade and more.

Indeed, it can justifiably be argued that Julie has promoted the cause of Gaelic music and culture more than any other artist since her uncompromising ascent into the hearts and minds of audiences all over the world with her first solo album, *Mar a tha mo chridhe*, in 2005.

With grace, charm, and bags of character and determination, she has dismantled walls—even on one famous occasion getting national airplay and hovering on the outskirts of the U.K. charts with her Gaelic language version of The Beatles' *Blackbird*—and only on her latest album, *Alterum*, has she recorded in English.

It's been a hectic year for her, including lots of touring, presenting the BBC Folk Awards in Belfast and the Folk Proms at the Royal Albert Hall in London, while juggling the role of a young mother of eight and six-year-olds.

"I see all my friends juggling, just in different ways. Everybody in this world is juggling but ours tends to be a more interesting juggling mix and we have to be a wee bit more creative. I think most people these days have to work hard to make it work. We all help each other out."

But she still found time to join the bill at Runrig's farewell concert celebrations at Stirling Castle. "There were just shy of 50,000 people, mostly from Scotland, but loads from Scandinavia, America, and Canada and farther afield, who'd come to Stirling for the weekend to listen to a band who sing half their set in the Gaelic language. I'd struggle to name another Scottish band who could command 50,000 bums on seats or standing in a field and sang along with every single song."

"When the band played their final song and walked offstage, 25,000 people carried on singing the verses unaccompanied for in the region of 11 minutes. It was like being in an enormous church with the congregation singing. I've never experienced anything like it. It was incredible. That shows the power and reach of Runrig and their words."

When Julie was a little girl growing up on the remote outpost of North Uist in the Western Isles (formerly Outer Hebrides) off the northwest coast of Scotland, one of her most profound memories was of Runrig arriving in 1990 to film a video of one of their tracks with the local children, one Julie Fowles among them.

"I've still got the letter from Scottish Television thanking us all for being there. With them finishing, you reflect and realize different songs and albums of theirs have been a soundtrack to your life in many ways and defined different chapters of your life. Their reach and the significance of what they did is only now coming to light."

"The number of people who've learned Gaelic entirely due to Runrig's songs, the number of young Gaels who suddenly—through Runrig songs—would learn something about their own history. The questioning of received history, what you are taught in schools and read in books and what the reality is. The history is written by the victors so you don't get the chance to question what went before and how Gaelic culture suffered and how Gaels suffered."

"So they have been a really powerful voice in telling our story. Highlanders and islanders weren't the first to come forward and shout from the rooftops but Runrig had a platform and gave Gaels a voice. They had a modern take and gave it a modern twist and brought it to a whole new generation."

Julie Fowles was one of that new generation and, steeped in her own

Gaelic culture and traditions amid fisherfolk and crofters in North Uist, naturally focused on the traditional songs she'd heard all her life when she embarked on a singing career herself. Even with Runrig's influential pioneering early work, it wasn't a direction that seemed likely to yield any sort of professional career, let alone commercial success. The language and the songs had for many years been ignored or—worse—ridiculed on the mainland for being outdated and archaic and the older people who carried them were pressured into feeling ashamed of a heritage that was in danger of being buried completely.

Yet Julie has taken Gaelic music and culture into hitherto unimagined areas of audience and geography, with concert performances all over the world, her high profile as a radio and TV presenter and numerous awards. Not bad for someone who admits she used to be terrified of singing and at the start of her career considered herself more of an instrumentalist, playing whistle, flute and bagpipes with the group Dochas, formed while she was still a student at the University of Strathclyde.

Perhaps her greatest achievement internationally, however, occurred in 2012 when, singing in English for the first time, she contributed the two big songs - *Touch The Sky* and *Into The Open Air* - for Disney's hit fantasy drama movie, *Brave*, putting a voice to the thoughts of the lead character, Merida.

"A great honour and a fantastic experience," is how she describes her involvement in *Brave* and, if there had been discussions and perhaps even a little soul-searching about whether she should perform the *Brave* songs in English or Gaelic, her heightened profile gained all around the world as a result, undoubtedly also gave Gaelic a huge boost.

You imagine that Julie—who talks so passionately of the importance of maintaining the Gaelic language, culture, and traditions—must be very angry that it was forced under the carpet for so long...

"Of course it makes me angry but it is what it is and you take it with you; you only win people over by being truthful and positive and true to what you believe in. The past is what it is."

"Never mind the stage and all that stuff, for me the big things are seeing my girls if they have a fright exclaiming in Gaelic or if they dream and talk in their sleep, it's in Gaelic. That's something I've given to them. They'll take that with them and that's by far the most important thing I've done."

"That's all you can do—just try and use the language and keep it alive in the real sense at a community level or a family level around the table. And when they have ceilidhs and other stuff together at the weekend with their friends, if we can do that, it's real achievement. And it's a great privilege for me to sing those songs onstage and if I can share my passion with other people it's a real bonus."

Is there a sense of crusade in what you do?

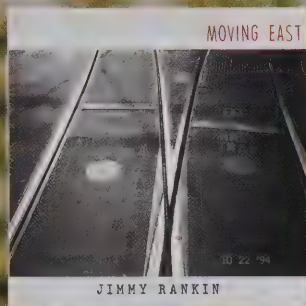
"When I started out I was genuinely just singing the songs I knew best and songs I loved. But as you get older and see how our language has been subdued and suffered so much, the more you learn you can't help being fiercely proud and I'm always ready to stand up for it."

"As a speaker of a minority language you have to be ready to defend it at all times and explain why it's so culturally important and reinforces your sense of identity in a positive way and roots you. I'm lucky enough to have 300 years plus of a family rooted in the one place speaking this language so I feel a very deep emotional, familial connection to this language, although Gaelic is not closed."

"If you come to Scotland or Germany or Canada or America or Spain, wherever there are Gaelic learners, it is a very welcoming language. Being bilingual is an amazing thing you can give to your kids and open their minds to other cultures."



# JIMMY RANKIN MOVING EAST



After moving back to Nova Scotia, inspired by the sea and the people, Jimmy has returned to his roots, teaming up with producer and fellow Nova Scotian, Joel Plaskett, and made what can only be described as an unabapologetically East Coast Roots album.

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# CRYSTAL SHAWANDA

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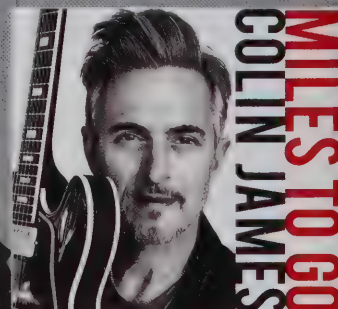


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# MILES TO GO COLIN JAMES

*Miles to Go* features 12 new tracks recorded in Vancouver with Colin's tight touring band, featuring rarely covered hidden gems written by blues legends

Muddy Waters, Blind Willie Johnson, & Howlin' Wolf, along with originals by Colin, including the first single “40 Light Years”



**Canada** **TRUE NORTH RECORDS**

Available September 21



Her passion burns as fiercely as it has ever done, even if her new album *Alterum* represents something of a departure, not merely for the inclusion of two English-language songs, *Go Your Way* and *Windward Away*, but for the expansiveness and broader styles it encompasses, with an almost orchestral approach in parts, along with some powerful Donald Shaw string arrangements.

"It felt like a different project altogether. It felt free-er. I knew from the start it wouldn't be all Gaelic and that made me feel a little bit more experimental. At the core it's the same but a different language gives it a new twist.

"Rather than just a bunch of songs I wanted it to be a whole package so the idea of visuals and filming to try and create a piece of art that was more two-dimensional. So not just the music but there was a story behind a lot of the lyrics that were connected so there was a visual element, and so we filmed some songs and made an animation for one of them to create a whole body of work rather than just a bunch of songs. It felt a deeper project. I really enjoyed that side of it. There was a bit more composition from me on it as well, which gives me more confidence to embark on another album of new compositions."

Among the album's highlights is a duet between Julie and Mary Chapin Carpenter (singing in Gaelic!), while she learned *Go Your Way* from the singing of one of the great legends of English folk song, Anne Briggs, and turns to a Scottish folk legend, Archie Fisher, for her other English-language song, *Windward Away*.

"I've loved Archie's music for such a long time. As the album came together there were a few seams running through it, and one of them was the Gaelic otherworld and a darker sense; but also a strong sense of the female, either in composers or characters in the songs, and this song seemed to fit the theme and the feel with the story of the female and lost love. He wrote it a long time ago but only put it to music quite recently. He was very gracious when I approached him about doing the song."

Other formidable contributors to *Alterum* include great Irish musicians such as Donal Lunny, Mike McGoldrick, and singer Muireann Nic Amhlaoibh, as well as a collaboration with South Uist singer Gillebride MacMillan, who joins Julie on a song inspired by Galicia, *Camariñas*.

Collaborations are nothing new to her.

"One of the most exciting things I do from year to year are collaborations. I love it. It's a good reinforcement of the human spirit. People collaborating and learning about other cultures, other ways of doing things, other styles of music, other languages—it's a healthy thing, but you do have to have the right mix.

She recently sang at and co-hosted the Folk Proms at London's Royal Albert Hall, which, somewhat controversially, involved her and artisan musicians such as uilleann piper Jarlath Henderson, Welsh group Alaw, singer Sam Lee, and English group The Unthanks setting their music to vast orchestral arrangements. Not everyone appreciated the enterprise, some commenting that folk music was best experienced in a 'people' environment in the back room of a pub or suchlike. Not unnaturally, Julie doesn't agree with them.

"I think it's important to try these things. If you're true to the tradition and believe in what you're doing and approach these collaborations with



respect for your own tradition but with an openness and willingness to embrace other traditions, then you are starting from a really good place."

Ultimately, though, it's all down to the richness and power of the song itself.

"Sometimes I do have an agenda in mind but most of the time it's more organic and I just fall in love with a song. It might be the melody or one turn of the melody that grabs you and stays with you; or it might be a lyric or a back story, maybe a lesser-known back story that is not apparent in the lyrics. It can be any of those things that grab you and gives you a connection to it. You need that to make a good job of singing a song. It's very hard to make a good job of a song if you don't believe in it."

Future projects include a commissioned work with Duncan Chisholm commemorating the century since the sinking of the *Iolaire*, when 205 naval volunteers from the Isle of Lewis died on New Year's Day, 1919, finally returning

from four years at war only to crash into rocks just 20 yards from shore, watched by horrified friends and loved ones waiting to welcome them home in the harbour.

"It's difficult to put into words the impact this had on a small community. Decades of women wearing black, an entire generation of men wiped out, while the ones left were so full of guilt many of them emigrated. It changed Lewis and the Hebrides forever. Yet people don't know about it. It is never talked about it. I feel very strongly if this had happened anywhere else in the U.K. people would know this story but they don't.

"So myself and Duncan were commissioned to write a multimedia piece of music to commemorate 100 years since the sinking, which is happening on Armistice weekend in November in Lewis. I have spent more nights crying on my kitchen table writing this piece. It's really monumental. We're doing two nights in Lewis but we decided it wasn't appropriate to tour this piece, it's too much, but I would be happy to do it in Glasgow at Celtic Connections in January just once and that's it.

"But hopefully there will be a legacy project where we can create something so people know the stories of these men. We did loads of research and found all these stories, some of tragedy, but also amazing feats of strength and determination. It's been heartbreaking."





## The Penguin Eggs Interview

# Hooray for the Riff Raff

“Hello, we are Hooray for the Riff Raff. fighting fascism one show at a time.”

The voice belongs to the effervescent Alynda Lee Segarra, a songwriter profoundly influenced by the likes of Woody Guthrie, Ani DiFranco, the Puerto Rican poet Pedro Pietri, and, latterly, Ziggy Stardust—David Bowie’s definitive, extraterrestrial alter ego.

While the massed ranks of the Riff Raff are out in force for their Saturday concert at the recent Edmonton Folk Music Festival, the previous night Segarra sat wide-eyed in a session with one of her heroes, Buffy Sainte-Marie.

Like Sainte-Marie, Segarra’s an articulate and inspirational voice for her community. Of Puerto Rican heritage, she identifies as queer. The daughter of Ninfa Segarra—the deputy mayor of New York City from 1994 to 2000 under Rudy Giuliani—Alynda ran away from home as a teenager and joined a musical band of hobos that hopped around the U.S. on freight trains. She played the washboard, learned clawhammer banjo, and made records in a laundromat and in the woods.

Eventually she landed in New Orleans and

formed Hooray For The Riff Raff, a flexible assortment of musicians that operated under her guidance and covered everything from country, roots, and traditional folk songs such as *Black Jack Davey* to Segarra originals such as *The New San Francisco Bay Blues*—a tasty reworking of Jesse Fuller’s chestnut.

A move to Nashville proved more cathartic. Segarra signed with ATO Records and scored a breakthrough with *Small Town Heroes*, an album of original songs gloriously forged in the Americana and folk tradition. It included *The Body Electric*, a powerful riposte to the murder ballads that highlight violence against women. It was voted the Political Song of the Year by National Public Radio. And *American Songwriter* magazine chose it as the best song written in 2014.

The overwhelming right-wing, conservative political climate in Nashville surrounding the American presidential election in 2016 also had a massive impact on Segarra. It eventually emboldened her to speak out on behalf of her Puerto Rican community, battered by the debt crisis and hurricane Maria.

In Nashville, she also first laid the groundwork for *The Navigator*—a fictionalized (yet

largely autobiographical) account of a teenager, Navita Milagros Negrón, who leaves a city only to return years later to remind her kinsfolk of their proud past. It’s a wonderful, inventive concept album inspired by Bowie’s *Ziggy Stardust* that deals with, amongst other things, the gentrification of an older community neighbourhood.

Undoubtedly, the highlight track is *Pa’lante*, which translates as *Onward* or *Forward*, a clarion call for all minorities to stand tall and revel in their heritage. It includes a sample from Pedro Pietri reading his iconic poem *Puerto Rican Obituary*. *Pa’lante* was initially the title of a newspaper published by The Young Lords, a Puerto Rican community activist group that agitated for change in New York City in the 1960s and ’70s.

Besides its political content, *The Navigator* broadens Hooray For The Riff’s musical outlook. While the folk and country remain, they now embrace bomba, salsa, son cubano, and doo-wop.

Roddy Campbell sat down with Alynda Lee Segarra at the Westin Hotel in Edmonton prior to her appearance at the folk festival.



**On *The Navigator* the Riff Raff now embrace various Latin influences and your focus appears more political; what brought about these changes?**

There were a number of things that inspired it, from the very personal to the political landscape in America that was unfolding. Also, all of my heroes have always played at pushing boundaries. I felt, 'OK, I'm ready to be challenged. I'm ready to try something new.'

On a personal level, my last remaining grandparent passed away, my grandmother. It was a really big moment for me.

I was there with my whole family saying goodbye and I was able to say to her, 'Everything you did has really made my life. I just want you to know that. Everything that I am going to do from now on is going to be with you in mind.' Because I had really selfish teenage years and I just did whatever I wanted. I left home and I lived on the streets and I was causing everyone in my family to lose their mind. And when she passed, I think I had inherited this responsibility to really carry forth her memory and to carry forth the future of what it means to be Puerto Rican, and what that identity means, and what it means in the context of the island.

I was also living in Nashville, in a state that overwhelmingly voted for Trump. I really had culture shock. 'I don't know if I just want to quietly fit in to this culture. I think I want to stand out. I think I want to be loud. I want to say, "Hey I just want to be sure of who I am, and where I come from, and where my alliances are, and the people that I want to stand up for".'

So all of that was happening at once, and at the same time I was learning about The Young Lords. I was listening to The Ghetto Brothers. I watched the documentary about Rodriguez (*Sugarman*). I was really getting into this world of Latino weirdos, for a lack of a better term. I was like, 'I can do this. I am just a beatnik. I'm just a bohemian kid from New York City. Why don't I use all of my influences? I love Woody Guthrie but I also want to sing like Lou Reed,' you know. And I also felt the spirit of someone like Woody saying, 'You've got to stand up for your people right now. Don't just live in the past.'

So I had a really fun time exploring this change with the audience that comes to see us. I got some criticism on the Internet. Who doesn't get criticism? Some people were like, 'I don't like this, I miss the old whatever'. And I was like, 'That's great. I'm a person. I'm allowed to be who I am. If you are too uncomfortable maybe you've got to think about why. There's always the old albums; you could listen to them.' But it's been really positive for me. It's been a really good growing process.

**I am surprised you went to Nashville.**

Talk about culture shock. I was in the worst way. I was in the Bible Belt. But it was really good for me because it taught me how to get in touch with my ancestors, just be on my own. I was always running in a pack. I left home and knew I was unsafe by myself. My whole life has been jumping in social circles: 'I'll join this gang. No, I'll join this gang,' running with these packs like wild bohemians And when I went to Nashville I couldn't join a pack. I was alone, so I really had to figure out who I was, and that's where *The Navigator* came from.

**You've said *The Navigator* is a concept album inspired by Ziggy Stardust. Ziggy was David Bowie's narrator. Is Navita Milagros Negrón your narrator?**

I felt the people that were narrating the story were the people appearing at the beginning and the end of the album. These do-wop guys I kind of see as the chorus in a Greek tragedy because I always felt in New York

City the people that play music on the street, and on the transportation system, are watching our lives unfold. They are watching all of our dramas, our good days, and our bad. I felt some guys on the subways watched me grow up from when I was 15 until I was 25. So I always thought of them as narrators.

And sometimes I feel like I took narration and I was telling everybody what my character was like. I felt that when I was doing the show live that was the role I was taking. I was telling everybody about this character. I was in-period. I wasn't ready to take on the roll of Ziggy and come in as the character but I was telling everybody about her [Navita].

**On the title track you sing, "I was raised on the streets do you know what that really means / all the hurt I've suffered." How autobiographical are your songs?**

I think they've always been autobiographical. I think on *Small Town Heroes* I was really toying around with telling a story other than my own. But since I started writing I was always coming from a deep place, talking about trauma...I kind of felt like they were stories of me trying to feel like a full person that deserves respect, that deserves love, that deserves to not be abused in relationships. That was a lot of where my art was coming from. And this story it is so interesting, even though it is about a character, this character is very much based on my life. *Living In The City* is very much about me growing up in New York City. I'm talking about characters I knew. I knew Big Danny. I was drinking a malt liquor called Hurricane. So it was very biographical, yeah.

***Fourteen Floors* includes the lines, "My father said it took a million years...just to get here." What inspired those lyrics?**

My father is a very artistic man. He's a musician and he's like a hip old hippy. For the last couple of years he's been telling me, 'You should write a song about growing up 14 floors up in the sky, like birds, in our nest'. He told me about flying from Puerto Rico when he was a kid. He was on a propeller plane and the seats were all lawn chairs, which is crazy. And as he said, it took about 24 hours to get to New York City. He said it felt like a million years.

He said that and it just sparked this idea: how many generations of people came with him? And how many generations of people are with me now? Our stories are going to keep evolving. It's so funny, people ask me where I get poetic inspiration. 'My dad, said it. My friend said it.'

***Pa'lante*, you've said, took several years to write; why so?**







Alynda Segarra and Hooray For The Rifles at the Edmonton Folk Music Festival

Photo courtesy: Stephen Wreakes and The Edmonton Folk Music Festival

I started writing [verse five] in 2013. It starts, “*Lately I’m not afraid to die.*” It was right before *Small Town Heroes* was coming out; I was in a really hard place. I was really unsatisfied for some reason. I felt like I wasn’t being myself. I felt like I didn’t know where I was going. I wrote that. I always kept it as I thought that it was a good part.

Then I started reading about Bruce Springsteen in *Love Goes To Buildings On Fire: Five Years in New York That Changed Music Forever*, learning about him as an artist. Reading about his beginnings made me write more verses and I was thinking what he represented.

Of course, with the debt crisis unfolding, watching Puerto Rico being talked about in the media as if it’s this very poor, desperate, welfare place really hurt me. And I wanted to rewrite that story and to say, ‘Yes I come from a people of struggle but this is also what it means: it means reclaiming your humanity.’

I guess I had to take in a lot of the news and take in a lot of the xenophobia and misogyny I was witnessing and it was finally in the studio where I was able to flip it. And, of course, learning about The Young Lords and about that phrase *Pa’lante*.

At first I was worried: “Is this too specific to talk about specifically Puerto Rican people but I’ve learned when you get specific and tell your unique story that was when a lot of people can actually be let in, who say, ‘I’ve felt like that’.” And it’s so beautiful to go all around the world and hear people yell *Pa’lante* because they feel it. They don’t have to know the words, they just have to understand what that feels like.

The day of the [presidential] inauguration I was in Scotland at Celtic Connections. We played our set and at the end I was like, ‘Today is a very bad day for us. I want to sing a song that means a lot to me.’ And I sang *This Land Is Your Land*. And I cried on the stage for the first time

ever in my life. I did not expect it and the whole crowd cried with me. They were so with us. They were like, ‘You are going to get through this, and we’re going to help you get through it, we’re not going to let this man do this.’ Scotland has a place in my heart.

#### **A sample of Pedro Pietri reciting his *Puerto Rican Obituary* appears on *Pa’lante*; what is it about that poem that appeals to you?**

I read that poem when I was in high school. I had a book called *The Outlaw Bible Of American Poetry*. I was obsessed with the beats. I was obsessed with Alan Ginsberg. That was the first time I saw my world, my reality. I saw my neighbours, the things that my family went through. And it wasn’t written for us to look good in front of people who didn’t know us. It wasn’t pretty. It was the harsh reality and it really affected me. And it still took me years to become proud. It was a really important time for me to see it and know what that’s like. I cut it out and put it my journal and I always thought about it.

And also, at the time, I was hanging out in the Lower East Side, although I grew up in the Bronx and it was about an hour train ride. It just took forever to get there but I felt a spiritual calling, to go hang out with the punk rockers, thinking I’m so different, my family doesn’t get me. And my dad was like, ‘That was where I was playing jazz and smoking weed when I was a kid. I grew up right by there. Your mother’s from there and that’s where the Nuyorican Poets Café was.’

So I found that and I was, ‘Wow, I am a part of this history.’ I just grew up feeling like, ‘What have we ever done? What did we ever add? I don’t see our flag anywhere. I don’t see our stories anywhere. Have Puerto Rican people ever done anything? So reading his poem and find-



ing that café it really meant a lot to me.

**The beautiful video for *Pa'lante* was shot in Puerto Rico after hurricane Maria, yes?**

The director Chris Martin was incredible. I really put a lot of faith in him because when I talked to him I felt he had understood what the song was about. He had felt it personally. I was like, 'You go and do the story, I don't want to be in charge of this story.' I wasn't the face of the story. I'm not from the island and also I feel like I get so much privilege from being so light-skinned, being so white-appearing. My experience is different and I wanted the story of people from there to be told. So I was happy to go, 'You tell the story of what everyday people on the street are experiencing.'

**How did the aftermath of hurricane Marie galvanize your politics?**

It's made me think so much about people on a global scale, of how poor people all over the world are being affected by the climate changing. People are going to start migrating because they are being displaced. So it made me think about the world, and sharing the world, and talking about immigration in a different way.

I had experienced post-Katrina New Orleans. I was there the year before. I watched New Orleans people struggle to keep their identity, to keep their culture, to keep their history, even though so many people were displaced. I see a lot of similarities with Puerto Rican people struggling to keep their identity and their history.

Who writes history? Before the Harvard Study came out and announced that over 4,000 died the [official] death count was about 68. And I find that is such an important thing for us to recognize about this [Trump] administration. A lot of what this administration is doing in America is taking control of the narrative and trying to write history in a way that dismisses a lot of pain and death and suffering of people of colour. So it has made me think about telling the real story and not being afraid or intimidated about telling the truth.

**Who are you talking to in *Hungry Ghosts*?**

Sometimes I'm talking to myself. Like I'll write a line, '*I'm ready for the world.*' It's a kind of affirmation of me saying, 'I got to go out there. This is the time that counts. I'm not getting any younger. I have to start in believing myself now.' So that's who I was talking to there. But I guess I was speaking about being forgotten when I ran away and feeling like I was a ghost. I thought I'd been forgotten by a lot of my friends. It was such a lonely period in my life and I went back to New York and realized, 'Did anyone really miss me?'

You know, you run away when you are 17 it's definitely a cry for help, or maybe not a cry for help but maybe attention. It's like, 'Hey guys, this is how miserable I am. This is how much I feel like a burden. I'm out.' When I went back it was really difficult so I was just trying to work through those feelings, I guess.

**It's apparent *Rican Beach* is about re-gentrification; as far as I know you are the first person to write about this subject.**

It's a worldwide problem. And I also felt it was so important to talk about it because it is such a modern problem and it so not musical. Gentrification doesn't sound good and it means getting rid of culture. It's the anti-music. OK. 'How do we take this concept, this problem, this issue and talk about it musically?' And I have always said when we [eventually] make the play, I want to make sure the city—it's just called the city—

it's not New York, it could be Mexico City, it could be San Francisco, it could be Tokyo. It is a worldwide issue so it's really been something that people all over the world relate to.

***The Body Electric* on *Small Town Heroes* drew widespread critical praise as an anti-murder ballad. What inspired it?**

That was a big step for me, being brave when writing a political song. It was also an experiment on how my brain works. I was thinking of so many things and putting it together. The Black Lives Matter movement really inspired it. I was watching an artist one night, who will remain nameless, singing about shooting his girlfriend who cheated on him. You know, it's like one of these old-timey styled songs.

I love a good murder ballad because it's a really good exercise in storytelling. But I feel we have to watch how we grow as societies and what we allow. You hear how some folk purists talk about hip-hop being so violent while they are singing about killing their girlfriend because she cheated on you. Maybe she wasn't happy. Do you know what I mean? We have to be careful when we are being so old-timey that we feel like we are writing a modern song in an old style and we think it doesn't affect culture, and it does. It really can perpetuate those very harmful narratives and violence. It's something that we've got to watch.

Not everybody has to be a social justice warrior. But I think we have to remember our words matter, our songs matter. So I was just like, I don't want to hear any more guys with guitars singing about killing their freaking girlfriends. It made me so mad, so I started writing with that in mind and it came very quickly.

I was also thinking about what was going on. Like, what it means when your body is the reason that somebody wants to kill you. They're like, 'Well, she was so beautiful it enchanted me. Well, she was a hussy. Well, this person was brown so she scared me.' That was something I really wanted to think about. My friend brought up the Walt Whitman poem *The Body Electric* and I thought it was such an interesting idea. There's a lot of things going on in that song but I was really happy how it came out and it gave me courage to keep writing like that.



Photo courtesy: Stephen Wreakes and The Edmonton Folk Music Festival



**How do you feel about Rudy Giuliani being Trump's attorney? Did you meet him when you were a kid?**

Oh, yeah. How bizarre and surreal it is to watch this unfold. My politics were formed after 9/11. I was about 14 years old. I remember it happening and we all got out of school. I went to a vigil and I remember everyone shouting U.S.A., U.S.A. I was a freshman in high school and I remember looking around and saying, 'Nope, I don't want to do this. This is not how I operate. This is not the point. Something sinister is going on.' That was when I turned to punk rock, to The Dead Kennedys, and I started realizing what was happening. So it's been horrifying.

I'm putting a lot of hope in our [upcoming] mid-term elections. It's so scary. The ripple effects [of the Trump administration] are going to last for generations.

The day of the election I had a panic attack, as did so many millions of other people. And I sat down and took all the books that I go to of my heroes: Frida Kahlo, Nina Simone, Woody Guthrie. I was looking at them and this voice came to me in my head that said, 'You have been preparing for this for a long time. It's time to step into the role.' I just remember thinking, 'I'm not brave enough to do this. My heroes have done this but I'm scared, I'm not Pete Seeger.'

I just remember thinking something talking to me, or whatever you want to call it, that just said, 'You've been preparing, your heroes have laid the groundwork, you have to follow in their footsteps.' I'm not saying I'm as brave as these people but I do feel a responsibility to continue their work and step into the spotlight.

**You wrote a blog slagging folk musicians for not standing up and being counted in the political arena. What made you do that?**

I wrote that years ago. When I look back, I think, 'Man, I was idealistic'. It was after Michael Brown got killed in Ferguson, Missouri, which really helped start the Black Lives Matter movement. And I had been watching and researching it from the sidelines and thinking, 'These protesters are revolutionaries. This is incredible what these black protesters are doing in this tiny town in Missouri.' I was glued to the Twitter, to the Internet, watching it, and researching it, and I was really disappointed in my fellow folksingers. And I remember thinking, man, for a lack of better term, 'Fuck you guys. What the hell is going on?' I felt that I was so alone when I'd go among people who considered themselves folksingers. I remember, and I still feel like, 'Do you guys even care? I don't know if you do. You seem very comfortable.'

So I wrote that article and I was really hoping to reach some people. Now my viewpoint is much more, 'Let's go to the people who are directly affected and hear what they have to say.' If other people, whom this doesn't affect, if they aren't going to use their platform I don't think I can convince them. But I can tell people, 'Hey, this band is directly affected by racism and they have great songs so listen to them. I can use my platform to amplify the voices that are already speaking out.'

**I see a lot of commonality between yourself and Ani DiFranco.**

My hero. When I was in the eighth grade, I learned to play the song *Fixing Her Hair*. It was really hard. But I learned it off the Internet and I played it and I wrote a woman's history project about her. I was eventually able to meet her in New Orleans.

**How did your politics develop? Through your mum?**

Not my mum. My mum is definitely more conservative than me, obviously. She worked with Giuliani for both his terms. I grew up with my aunt and uncle, who are very working class. My aunt was a homemaker. My uncle worked in construction and then he worked in the project building we lived in. They have always been very working-class Democrats.

I remember asking as a kid, 'What does Republican mean?' and my aunt, she's like, 'That's somebody who doesn't care about poor people.' I'm, like, 'OK [laughs]'. She grew up very Catholic but didn't push it on me. She had this beautiful version of Catholicism that was like, 'You better care for the poor. That's why we are here. Even if you don't have a lot of money, you give \$5 to the St. Jude's Children's Hospital.' So I really learned that it was important to be charitable but also to remember where you come from.

My father is just a straight-up radical and he served in Vietnam when he was a really young kid. When I was very young, my dad would say to me, 'I want you to know something: when I was in Vietnam they put me in the front line because I am brown and they put black people on the front lines. That's how it worked.'

I was in middle school. They just didn't hide a lot of the harsh realities of the world from me. So it really shaped my view of the world and it made me very protective of also the misuse of the better-end narrative. We talk about supporting our veterans. Yeah, I want to support our veterans. My dad has PTSD. He could have died. I am so lucky he is here and he doesn't want more wars and he doesn't want any more poor people to suffer. So that's a veteran we should be listening to, you know. So that's where I got a lot.

Then, of course, when I went into the punk scene I was energized by young people. I wanted to change the world. Punk can be so apathetic. But the punk scene I was in was about, there was an organization called Another World Is Possible. There was so much anti-war protest going on. It was such an exciting time.

I am so inspired by [Alexandria] Ocasio-Cortez the woman who is currently running for Congress in the Bronx. She's very progressive. Someone like her, that's who I'm excited by.

**How did you discover Woody Guthrie?**

I travelled with a group called The Dead Man Street Orchestra. We were seven hobos with a dog. I played the washboard. We had a couple of albums we recorded in a laundromat and one in the woods. We just played old folksongs. It was a mixture of everyone's interests; we did klezmer songs, we did old folk songs, we did Tom Waits songs. We were very scraggly and we rode freight trains together and that was my start off, 'I want to play music'.

We all loved Woody and we could all sing his songs around the campfire and feel it: I'm going down the road feeling bad. Or, I've been doing some hard travelling. So his music really spoke to me. I met Sam Doores, who I've been playing music with for years. He's on so many of the albums. He was really a Woody Guthrie fanatic and we started going to Pampa, Texas, to the Woody Guthrie Centre and we started going to Okmeh, Oklahoma, where the Woody Guthrie folk festival happened.

Then I read *Bound For Glory*. I fell in love with his spirit. I felt like his spirit was guiding me a lot in my life and I took it really seriously. Sam would be like, 'Of course, a little Puerto Rican girl from the Bronx would inherit Woody Guthrie's spirit. It makes so much sense.' But I really loved Woody for that reason. I loved that he was dangerous.



## What about the traditional songs you sing?

I really got into the Alan Lomax recordings and, of course, *The Harry Smith Anthology*. I also wrote an editorial about the blues women and how much they meant to me, Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey. I read this book called *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* by Angela Davis, when I was about 19. She transcribed all of Bessie Smith's lyrics, all of Gertrude Ma Rainey's. That really inspired me, too, because that's when I began to think, 'OK, I can use my songwriting to bring feminism into this world. I can talk about the personal and make it political and make it musical. But I also really loved Mississippi John Hurt and the Reverend Gary Davis.

**You were also inspired by country-leaning artists like Townes Van Zandt and Guy Clark, and, of course, Hank Williams.**

A place that taught me about that was the Jalopy Theatre [in the Bronx]. There was this weekly show called *Roots 'n' Ruckus* that happens there every Wednesday. It's been happening for years and I would go there and play. And I was learning so much from that crew. It was run by a guy called Feral Foster. I went on tour with him.

## Why the banjo?

Clawhammer, that was the first style I learned to play. I wanted something lightweight. I was scared of the guitar; it really intimidated me. Also, the group I was in, The Dead Man Street Orchestra, needed a banjo. So I said, 'OK, I'll take it on.' And I really loved it. It was already in a chord and it was very percussive and very melodic. As I've grown older I just love the guitar. I started learning how to fingerpick and I felt so supported by the sound of the guitar, the fingerpicking, the percussion, and the bass of it. So the banjo felt a bit limiting as I was getting older.

## What was the turning point for Hooray For The Riff Raff?

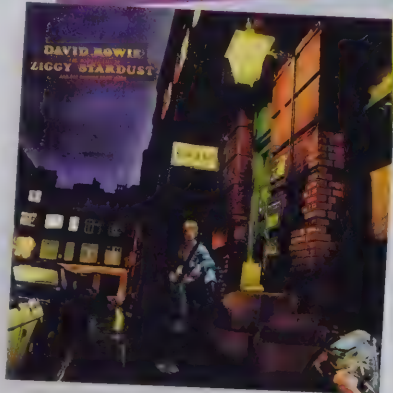
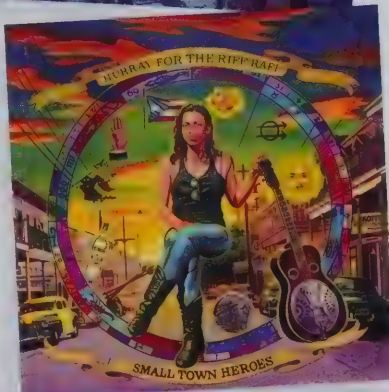
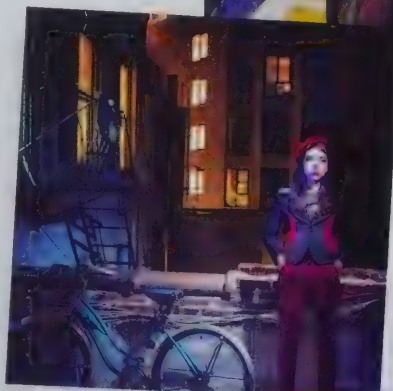
I guess it was a slow burn. I had been writing songs since I was 19 and I had been writing poetry prior to that, journals, stuff like that. In New Orleans, I met some people who really believed in me. So there was a lot of people along the way that were, 'Hey, keep going. I'm watching you. Keep going.' And when I was signed to ATO that was the biggest moment. 'Holy Shit, this is real. I could do this.' But still, it's little steps, little steps, slugging it out on the road.

And *The Navigator*, even though I was 28, 29 when it finally came out, that was really a moment when I thought, 'I can fully be myself. I don't have to be scared. I can be complicated. I can take chances. I can do whatever I want musically.'

So *The Navigator* was a really important time for me. I was in place where I thought, 'Can I keep doing this? This is exhausting and scary.' And to be honest, I would go to some shows and wasn't sure people in the audience knew who I was and what I felt. I couldn't connect with them because they



Alynne Hegarra: 'I'm goin' down that old dusty road...'



wanted something. I was like, 'You guys, I want to talk about social justice. I just don't want to play *Blue Ridge Mountain* for you. This album made me say, 'No, I can do this.' My fan base loves me. They support me and I can be who I am and I can step into my role as a political songwriter and just like the poet I want to be.

Also, I saw Patti Smith perform. That was in 2017, and when I saw her perform it was, 'This is it. This is the goal. This woman and her legacy, her art, is what I strive for. And her integrity!'

## How does Hooray For The Riff Raff work?

I've had this name since I was about 19 when I made a demo' that was just me on my friend's laptop. I kept going and I would get bands. I love the family unit and I love the dynamic, so that happens naturally with the people I play with. I'm always the boss, I'm always the person who is writing and has the vision. People have their own lives and they have to be free to grow and change. I have to be free to grow and change. So I'll get a family dynamic and then it'll be, 'Hey, Sam's [guitarist Doores] got to go do his music and Josi [fiddler Perlstein] has to go and live in the country.' So that's been happening for years. I feel now it's just a new family. I'm really playing around using just my name. I think it would be great for writing plays and acting and stuff like that so that's how it's going to go.



# Reviews



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Alejandro Escovedo

## Alejandro Escovedo

The Crossing (Yep Roc Records)



I'll freely admit that I slept on Alejandro Escovedo for years, missing numerous perfor-

mances at the bigger festivals out here in Alberta. This summer, at Interstellar Rodeo in Edmonton, I was treated to exactly my kind of rock'n'roll by the 40-year songwriting veteran.

Escovedo's latest, *The Crossing*, is a sprawling, deep piece of work, hinging on the feelings of being treated like an outsider in the country in which you've spent most of your life.

A few cuts in, *Teenage Luggage* brims with a gritty brand of distinctively Texan punk rock, referencing Austin eastsiders, venomously calling them out:

"You think you know me, you don't know me, you're just a bigot with a bad guitar." Escovedo doesn't hold back, and the music is just as unrelenting, a gnarly guitar feeding back throughout much of the tune, leading into one of the album's darkest lines, "America's a bloodstain in a honky tonk kill."

Title track *The Crossing* closes the record, a dark, sweeping, epic, piano-driven ballad. It's here I finally caught up to the familiarity I felt in Escovedo's vocal timbre. It may have taken a sparse

ballad, but his tone in crooning over grand chord changes is really close to David Bowie, far closer than any number of artists who make the effort to catch up to the Starman.

These are hard days for Americans of any descent other than white, and Escovedo has made some bold statements on *The Crossing*, and for good reason. Both punk and folk music have been gentrified to mostly heart-break songwriting, with so many mid-level independent artists afraid to say something drastic, for fear of inciting some Internet-based flaming.

Unfortunately, in their fear, some of the original intent of folk music and punk rock got lost. On *The Crossing*, Escovedo plays and writes without fear, even when his hopeful vision of America is under constant attack.

— By Michael Dunn

## Balsam Range

Mountain Overture (Mountain Home Music Co.)



It's easy to wonder about the attraction bluegrass bands have to working

with orchestras, but it's a trend that doesn't seem to be dying anytime soon. Cherryholmes, Daily & Vincent, Michael Cleveland—the cynic might feel that it's a desire

to grant respectability, and what better way to do it than to sit in front of a bunch of musicians in formal wear.

*Balsam Range* is, to my mind, one of the very best bands working today, and now they've done it, too. *Mountain Overture* is a collaboration with the Atlanta Pops Orchestra and includes some of their best material, including *Last Train To Kitty Hawk*, *Eldorado Blue*, and *I Hear The Mountains*. That material, in the original recordings, had a brilliant mix of caution and drive; it served to relate stories of various kinds of isolation, a perennial trope of bluegrass. *Balsam Range* doesn't have the high lonesome voices of some of the originators of the form, but they do have the sentiment, that of being out there, on your own, left to puzzle over the vagaries of love, and work, and the fickleness of fortune.

Classical music, of course, doesn't share the same perspective, and the tension between sensibilities exists throughout this recording. The drive is held back by the arcing strings, the agility reduced by weighty arrangements. Sometimes the punctuation that the orchestra adds is unfortunate, as the horns just after the line *Last Train To Kitty Hawk*, undercutting the sentiment, cheapening it, rather than supporting it.

The thoughts—as in that case, the things that we lose within

an encroaching modernity—are reduced to footnotes. Which is too bad, because these are great thoughts, related within some fantastically written songs. I'm not exactly sure who this album is for—a grump will say that working with an orchestra is more for the band than the audience—but, in any case, the better recordings are the originals.

*Balsam Range* is a great band, with great writing and beautiful arrangements, all most evident when it's just them, alone against the world. If you are new to *Balsam Range*, start with the albums *Mountain Voodoo* and *Last Train To Kitty Hawk*. They're fantastic and truly deserve your attention. *Mountain Overture* is meh.

— By Glen Herbert

## Loudon Wainwright III

Years In The Making (Story Sound Records)



Eccentric, unpredictable, crazy, hilarious, brilliant, eloquent, risqué, silly, original, and

enduring. Any or all of the above adjectives—and a whole boatload more—can be applied to Loudon Wainwright III.

For 50 odd years, his sprawlingly successful career has been highlighted by more than 20 album releases, film and TV credits (he was Capt. Calvin Spalding, the "singing surgeon", on *M\*A\*S\*H*), and the persistent and sometimes





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unwelcome legacy of his hit novelty song *Dead Skunk (in the Middle of the Road)*.

In 2017, his autobiography, *Liner Notes*, was published, but not content to leave it there, his 27th album, a self-styled audio-biography, *Years In The Making* now walks amongst us. It boasts 42 tracks including live performances, demos, outtakes, unreleased songs, live guitar string changing, and musical family scrapbook items. He's joined at various points along the way by Kate McGarrigle, Suzzy Roche, Bill Frisell, and Van Dyke Parks, and his kids Rufus, Martha, Lucy, and Lexie. This two-disc set is divided into seven chapters within a 60-page hardback book, with documents and other artifacts including paintings and drawings by friends and fans. It is two hours of solid and unrelenting entertainment!

As Loudon himself said, "*Years In The Making* covers a lot of ground, about half a century's worth. Sonically it's all over the place and, at times, noticeably low-fi, but my co-producer Dick Connette and I decided that didn't matter as much as offering up something that was spirited and representational."

Just in case you need a bit of Loudon-esque encouragement to get this record, then consider the fact that Bonnie Raitt, Johnny Cash, Earl Scruggs, Kate & Anna McGarrigle, Rufus Wainwright,

and Mose Allison have all recorded his songs. What the hell makes you so special? Oh, yeah—and his version of Richard Thompson's *Down Where the Drunkards Roll* is wonderful! So, play it LOUD and make him RICH!

— By Tim Readman

## Lucy Ward

Pretty Warnings (Betty Beetroot Records)



This is the first album from Derbyshire's Lucy Ward since 2015's well-received *I Dreamt I Was A Bird* and

her fourth release.

It was co-produced by Stu Hanna (guitar, keyboards) and Stephen Maclachlan (drums, percussion) and features Helga Ragnarsdottir, (backing vocals, keyboards), Anna Esslemont, (violin, backing vocals), Sam Pegg, (electric and double bass), and Claire Bostock (cello).

The material is a mix of Ward originals and traditional songs. There is a strong preponderance of murder, gallows pole, and love-gone-awry material and a sombre mood prevails, albeit in an often-gorgeous musical setting.

One standout track is the chilling and sensitive reading of the murder ballad *Bill Norrie*, a gruesome and disturbing tale if ever there was one. Another is the slow, blues-infused, atmospheric rendition of *Maria Martin*—another murder ballad.

Of the original songs, *Lazy Day* is a wistful, dreamy number with a delicate melody supported by silky harmonies, which might have fallen from the pages of the Nick Drake songbook. This is a sublime collection of primarily intense and dark songs, which will beguile anyone with the good sense to listen.

— By Tim Readman



John Wort Hannam

## John Wort Hannam

Acres of Elbow Room (Independent)



It's been a bit more than 17 years since I first heard the dulcet tones of one John

Wort Hannam from down southern Alberta way. Since then, it has been a total pleasure watching and listening as his career unfolded... as it should. It was all there; the songs, the voice, the entertaining stage presence. His songwriting got stronger and over the years moved over to the more personal and universal.

Now just past 50, he's been through life's grist mill and has depression, real-life love, and experience with kids to feed his art. Seven CDs later, his new release is titled *Acres of Elbow Room* and contains acres of feelings from his responses to what life has thrown at him. It's what a gifted artist does.

John's familiarity with the aching of depression is chronicled realistically and ever so beautifully in *Key of D Minor* and he pours out his basic beliefs and tenets of life in the wonderfully optimistic and catchy *I Believe*.

"*That's me in a nutshell / nothing much but what the hell /*

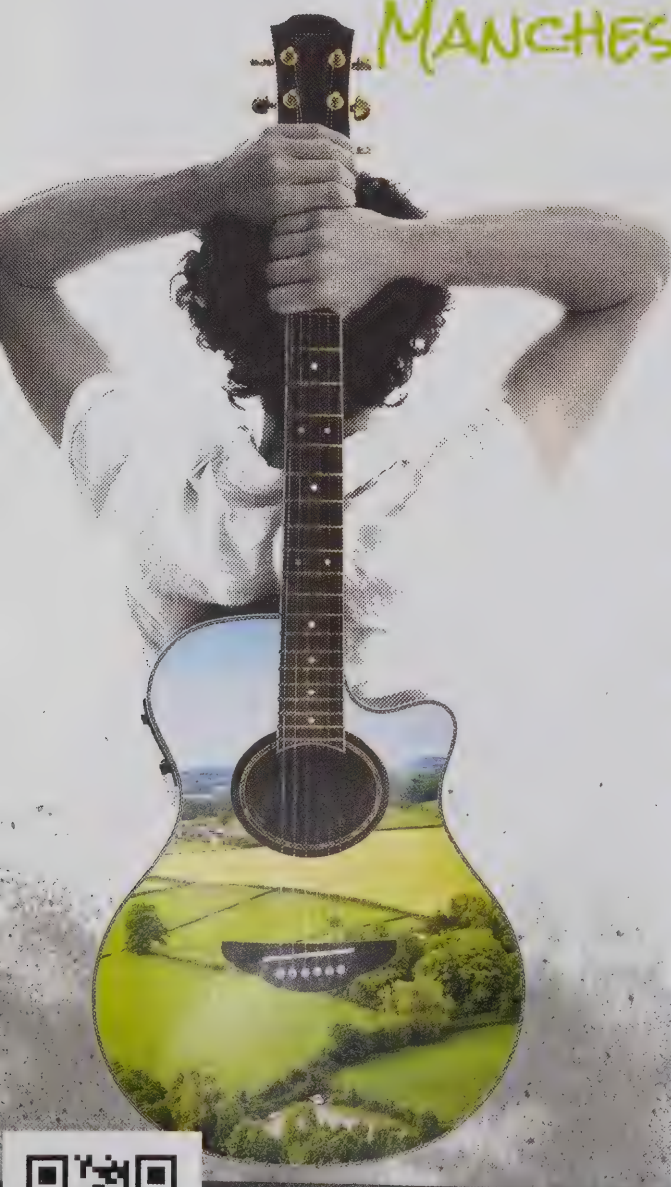


Lucy Ward



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all I need is my old D18 / and the songs that it brings.”

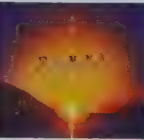
John went to Alberta’s incubator of creativity, the Banff Centre, with a terrific assortment of band-mates where this lovely piece of work was recorded. Lovely, tasteful work from Jason Valleau on upright bass, Jon May on drums, Stephen Fletcher on Hammond, and Jesse Zubot on fiddle.

*Acres of Elbow Room* is a fine next step in a terrific artistic journey we are lucky to be witnessing.

– By les siemieniuk

**The Barra MacNeils**

On the Bright Side (Independent)



This is the first album of new material released by this venerable Cape Breton act since 2005’s *All At Once*. Not much has changed in terms of their material—they still span everything from traditional tunes and Gaelic folksongs to singer/songwriter fare and breezy, big, shiny, pop numbers.

Things get off to a typically lively start with the jig set *Welcome To Boston*, which is followed by a robust rendition of *The Jug of Punch*. Suddenly we are then in Popland with *The Dream*, with its funk-tinged groove and lyrics about living in a consumer society.

Later, on *Clouds Under My Feet*, they delve into electronica using a thudding beat and chanting vocal style. The men show off their vocal chops on *The Underachiever*, an a cappella song about the struggle to make a living.

*The Way Old Friends Do* features the whole group singing smoothly together in harmony about the power of enduring friendship. So the Barra MacNeils’ formula is still the same as ever and for their legions of fans this will be a welcome addition to their catalogue, to be embraced enthusiastically. Sadly, it all lacks real substance and depth and consistently steers just a bit too close to the middle of the road.

– By Tim Readman



**Shemekia Copeland**

America’s Child (Alligator Records)



There’s no shortage of folks horrified at the state of the Union and the outspoken daughter of Texas bluesman Johnny Copeland gives her father even more to be proud of, beyond her eight releases.

*Ain’t Got Time For Hate* tells it like it is, with little time for apologies—its all-star cast going a long way to underlining the gravitas of the issues across this anthemic, soulful salvo. Contrast this with the surprisingly word-heavy *Americans*—a painful, rhyme-driven rap on individualism that grates more than it unifies, despite tasty pedal steel from Paul Franklin to offset the busy lyric.

Instantly redeemed by *Would You Take My Blood?*, Copeland’s history of social commentary continues with the ultimate anti-racist question. Producer, guitarist, and keyboardist Will Kimbrough is Copeland’s secret weapon as she tackles all the peculiarities of being American, enlisting a surprising cast of non-blues celebrities to help paint her portrait.

Case in point, John Prine duets on his own *Great Rain*. As disparate as this combination might

sound, it works well, as does the cameo by Rhiannon Giddens on banjo in *Smoked Ham and Peaches*. To her credit, the historically bold and brassy Copeland turns the heat way down on this Mary Gauthier/John Hahn composition yet her vocal retains the pleasing gospel sound that’s a part of her DNA.

*The Wrong Idea* is continued proof of Copeland’s newfound ability to inhabit most genres while retaining her sass and relentless power—in this case, a fiddle-fuelled country song with legs. Cue Steve Cropper on the gentle ballad, *Promised Myself*—penned by her dad—and embrace the pure soul that is her middle name.

The exceptional *In The Blood Of The Blues* is more than a statement of fact—she pumps the blood of the blues, redefining it at every opportunity. Will Kimbrough’s guitar is front and centre on this blues-rocker while unidentified background vocalists help launch the ever-powerful Copeland into the stratosphere.

Awkward rhyme (“match”? “cigarette”?) partially cripples *Such A Pretty Flame*, yet the backdrop provided by Al Perkins’s pedal steel and Kimbrough’s guitar work together to make it soar. The darker grind of *One I Love* is

a miss in Copeland’s arsenal, the lyric sounding foreign, despite Kimbrough’s blistering guitar Kimbrough and J. D. Wilkes’s harmonica scorch.

The Ray Davies cover *I’m Not Like Everybody Else* (with some of Kimbrough’s most wrenching slide) seems tailor-made as a theme song, if not her chosen way of life. The gentle closer, *Go To Sleep Little Baby*, exercises a softer side of the stormy singer which, truth be told, should get out more often. An intriguing bag of roots and blues as Copeland explores her options, her strengths becoming all the more obvious in the bargain.

– By Eric Thom

**Tim Edey**

How Did You Know? (Gnatbite Records)



Ballads, fiddle tunes, blues, and even a little jazz. There’s a mish-mash of styles here from one of Celtic music’s finest, and he makes it all work with a little help from a host of friends.

Edey is a world-renowned multi-instrumentalist who has toured with many big names—The Chieftains, Christy Moore, and Natalie McMaster to name three. He’s best known for his mastery



of the melodeon and guitar but he effortlessly glides onto the piano bench or grabs a bass on this tune or that song depending on his collaborators, a *Who's Who* from Celtic powerhouse folk bands such as Altan, Capercaile, and Session A9.

The recording starts with a set of three tunes, *Box and Fiddle Party*, with Gordon Gunn on fiddle and some jazzy scat singing from Scottish songstress Lizabett Russo tossed in for good measure. It's immediately followed by some acoustic blues, a tribute to claustrophobia—*The Elevator Blues*. And it carries on from there, alternating between instrumentals and songs. It's a fine mix of mostly kinda sorta traditional folk from a masterful musician.

— By Eric Rosenbaum

## Rory Block

A Woman's Soul: A Tribute to Bessie Smith

(Stony Plain)



Bessie Smith was called the Empress of the Blues and the greatest blues singer of all

time, renowned for her powerful, passionate delivery. Given Block's wealth of tribute subjects—her *Mentor Series*—she's more than overdue in covering her first female artist.

As always, Block's acoustic blues guitar skills set the stage while her finesse on slide serves to accent a voice capable of equal parts soul and grit. Despite the daunting challenge of paying tribute to The Empress, Block's interpretive gifts shine brightly on *Gimme a Pigfoot and a Bottle of Beer* and many of Smith's more steamy offerings.

From the provocative *Do Your Duty* to the lusty *Need A Little Sugar In My Bowl*, Block holds high the inner strengths of a woman who would choose the ostracizing, if not downright dangerous, route of defying society's rules to become a road-travelling blues singer at a time when even the men were forced to be cautious.

Smith's trail-blazing ways



underlined her power as a woman and a sexy, sensual being at a time when such was beyond taboo. Little wonder Block adds her patented zest to each of these 10 tracks, with standouts including *I'm Down In The Dumps* and *Empty Bed Blues*.

If, by providing exposure to Smith's music, you set you out in search of the originals, that would appear to be Block's main mission. Along the way, you'll fall captive to her own brand of one-woman-show and some of the most beautiful, most fluid guitar playing you're likely to hear.

— By Eric Thom

## Ali McCormick

That Place You Know (Independent)



For her third disc, Lanark, ON-based Ali McCormick stuck with the experience of another

Ottawa-area musician, Brock Zeeman, who also produced her second disc, 2016's *Clean Water*. The prolific Zeeman has 12 of his own discs and a great deal of experience in the business.

This time around, they went for a harder, band-based sound

to compliment the singer/songwriter's acoustic guitar stylings, pairing her, guitar-wise, with Brad Smith, himself an experienced multi-instrumentalist, singer/songwriter and producer to interweave the guitars and add backing vocals. The band is filled out by Blair Michael Hogan (bass), Dylan Roberts (drums), Tyler Kealy (piano, organ), Japhy Sullivan (fiddle), George Turcotte (banjo, mandolin), and others.



The mood is consistent Americana and steeped in McCormick's childhood memories and recollections of rural romance on the land. The sound is big, crisp, professional, and showcases the songs, punching up McCormick's vocals with either double-tracking or complimentary backing vocals.

It should help expand her audience from folk-based singer/songwriter venues to a more urban crowd. But if you just want to hear the charm of her with a guitar, check out her video for the song *Tape Deck*.

— By Barry Hammond

## Various Artists

Small Island Big Song (Independent)



A project three years in the making, *Small Island Big Song* is an odyssey across 16

Pacific island nations, recorded by Tim Cole and BaoBao Chen, as they travel from Madagascar to Rapa Nui (Easter Island), Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands, New Guinea, and on beyond Zebu, tracing ocean currents and trade winds.

Concerned by the steady loss of nature and culture throughout the islands, the couple invited indigenous musicians to present music "that made them proud" of who they are. The results are surprising and delightful. The seriousness of the mission never impairs the playfulness and joy of the music.

Cole laid out parameters for the recordings: "We used traditional instruments or instruments that are claimed by the people. We recorded out in the open, in a spot the artists chose. Some things were really traditional, others more contemporary."

Who knew bamboo could make an entire orchestra? Malagasy musicians Rajery and Tarika Sammy dazzle with their command of the valiha, a bamboo tube shaved down to leave surface fibres serving as strings; Charles Maimarosia from the Solomon Islands lays down a rockin' beat with his bamboo panpipes; there are bamboo flutes from Bali, and





percussion from the women of the Gaua Islands, who beat the water rhythmically in a song created to herd the fish towards the fishermen. Elsewhere, bamboo tubes of different lengths are tied into stacks and struck with paddles, creating an organ-like sound. These are instruments I'd never heard before, and I instantly fell in love with them.

The booklet which accompanies the 18 tracks is full of beauty shots of the incredible islands the musicians call home, and the plea for awareness and respect for the heritage and environment of these magical places is palpable. This summer, the musicians are on tour throughout Europe, with a dazzling panorama of videos shot during the outdoor recording sessions.

This album and this project will win your heart.

– By Lark Clark

## Eliza Carthy & the Wayward Band

Big Machine (Topic Records)



You could say, if you were a lazy writer such as myself, that Big Machine is the culmination of everything that Eliza Carthy has been working towards since she first launched her career in the company of Nancy Kerr back in the '90s.

Its heart is the English tradition that she was born into but on any given song you're just as likely to hear the strains of contemporary pop, post-punk asceticism, and even hip-hop.

In the hands of someone lesser, these would just be disparate influences but not in Eliza Carthy's hands, no. Hers is a bold, fierce, and singular vision!

*Great Grey Back* is a shanty that will kick your ass into the penguin mists of the Antarctic while I'd put her take on Rory McLeod's *Hug You Like A Mountain* up against almost any pop pretender you'd care to mention.

Trust me, once you've heard the songs of Big Machine you won't soon forget them.

Wayward indeed.

– By Richard Thornley

## Tinsley Ellis

Winning Hand (Alligator Records)



Those in search of a new guitar hero can rest easy. Searing blues bordering on blues-

rock, Ellis has a pedigree a mile long, lives to play live and his hefty catalogue of 17 releases suggests a level of accomplishment of which legends are made.

Equal parts shred and simmer, Ellis, a native of Atlanta, GA, channels everyone from B.B. and Freddie King to Muddy Waters,

Carlos Santana, Robin Trower, Robert Cray, and Peter Green across an equally diverse choice of guitars, each with their different voices.

And speaking of voices, cue up *Sound of a Broken Man*, its mid-tempo groove setting up his trademarked, razor-sharp leads well-matched to his equally emotive, rough-hewn vocal rasp. A supremely talented singer/songwriter (Leon Russell's *Dixie Lullaby* is the sole cover here), this might well be the quintessential Ellis track.

Nine tracks later, you'll be a convert as this latest release showcases a powerful sound that few can muster. Credit Kevin McKendree (keyboards, baritone guitar),

Steve Mackey (bass), and Lynn Williams (drums) for their parts in nine blistering tracks where the party starts now.

Cue *Gamblin' Man*, its slow pace setting up a solid, heartfelt vocal performance and more standout solos which, at one point, resembles the crying sounds of distant seagulls. Kevin McKendree's B3 contribution is substantial.

At the same time as *Winning Hand* reveals Ellis's southern heritage, it frees him from the confines of the blues-rock mantle he carries. Ellis is clearly more than his many influences and library of playing styles, turning them to his advantage to create his own very personal, inimitable identity.

While faster tracks such as *Kiss*





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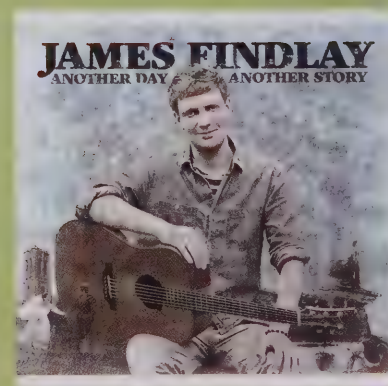
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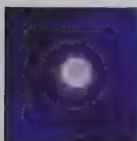
*This World* and *Satisfied* exorcise all demons while reflecting his raw power, it's the slower tracks that reveal his truest talents. *Don't Turn Off The Light* provides his throaty baritone something to bite into while *Saving Grace* illuminates his creative fretwork, making the most of his soulful vocals—the song assuming a definitive Trower-esque vibe. The fact that it clocks in at over eight minutes only disappoints that it can't last longer.

Tinsley Ellis has a *Winning Hand*, indeed, but it's his head and his musical approach that differentiates him from all others.

— By Eric Thom

## Silas Lowe

*Wandering Father Forgotten Son* (Independent)

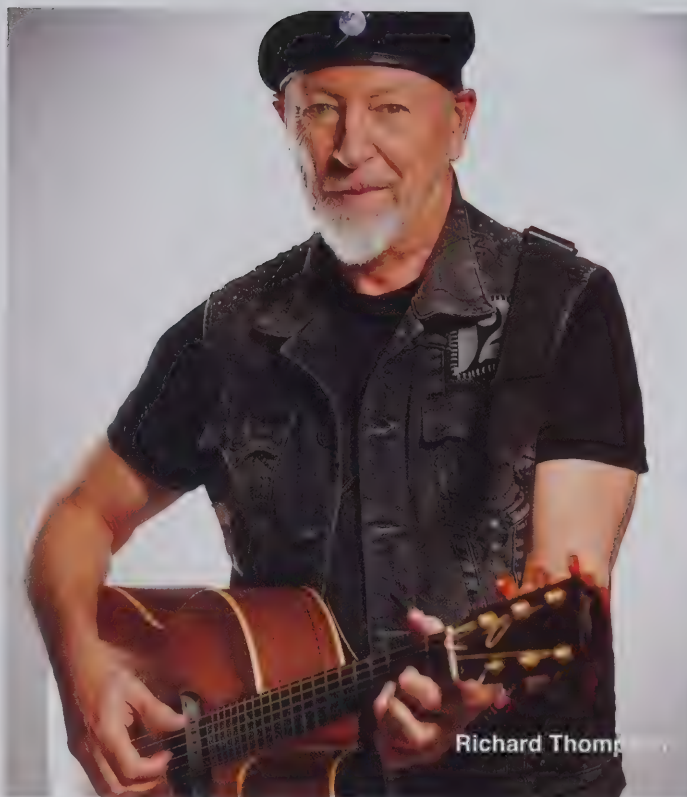


This is an album co-written by the ghost of Silas Lowe's father, who penned six of the 12 tracks on this bittersweet collection.

Lowe's dad, Roy Michaels, was the leader of Cat Mother and the All Night Newsboys, which had its heyday in the late '60s, which included an album produced by Jimi Hendrix and a radio hit, *Listening To That Good Old Rock'n'Roll* (does that ring a bell?). Michaels left his family and drifted off to Thailand, having little contact until later in life, when father and son reunited over the common ground of music. Michaels died in 2008.

Austin-based Lowe unearthed his father's songs and gave them loving treatment, interspersing them with his own to come up with a blend of rather dark Americana-flavoured tunes.

Lowe's tune, *About A Dying Father*, seems to be the fulcrum for the project. "My poor poor body, my poor poor soul, regret rules my life now that I'm old," he sings, putting himself in his father's head. Michaels seems to answer with *Angel's Devil*: "Who can you trust when the times they get rough? Who's going to stand by your side. I do believe the dev-



Richard Thompson

*il's got a hold on me, and he ain't about to let me go."*

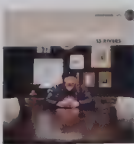
It's not all darkness. Lowe's *Moving To Manchaca* is a bouncy ode to moving to the country that features guitar, mandolin, and fiddle trading fours. Michaels's *Memphis* is a delta blues tune about waking up in the back seat of a car to find yourself in the home of rock'n'roll.

Michaels's tunes are a hidden treasure, and the depth of Lowe's own songs shows that the apple didn't fall far from the tree, no matter how far away it was transplanted.

— By Mike Sadava

## Richard Thompson

*13 Rivers* (New West Records)



Universally referred to as the "English folk-rock legend", this is Richard Thompson's first studio LP since he released *Still* in 2015.

He's taken over the production chair from Jeff Tweedy for this one but continued with his electric live band for backing—Michael Jerome (drums, percussion), Taras Prodaniuk (bass), and Bobby

Eichorn (guitar).

There's a freewheeling spirit to the playing and Thompson, as usual, throws out some extremely tasty guitar solos. *Bones of Gilead* provides perhaps the most outstanding example as the band click and chop their way through a rhythm track that is vulnerably human in its feel and clinically robotic in its amazing precision. The percussion-driven *The Storm Won't Come*, which opens the album, also features remarkable, bendy lead guitar. The lyrical themes revolve around personal struggle through darker times—

perhaps best exemplified by *Do All These Tears Belong To You?*, with its plaintive chorus and desperate, stuttering guitar work.

This is another excellent album from a living treasure that demands repeated listening.

— By Tim Readman

## Clay Parker & Jodi James

*The Loneliest Sound That Can Sound* (Independent)



I'm not sure why I love this recording so much. We like to talk in superlatives

whenever given a chance, and it's not the best of anything, the most skilled, or the most telling. It's just, well, lovely.

The voices are beautiful, the thoughts quietly moving. The playing doesn't jump out at you, but sits back, like a kid busking in the farmers market: it catches you as you walk past, turning your head with the thought, "Hey, that's pretty good." It's more than pretty good, actually.

This is one of those albums that sparks a desire to participate with in it, to grab a guitar or a mandolin and play along. It's all new material, but so much of it sounds familiar, perhaps because they are participating in something, too.

There are responses here to Woody Guthrie, Doc Watson, Willie Watson. The titles suggest connections to the canon, and I think that's intentional: the gallows tree,



Clay Parker & Jodi James



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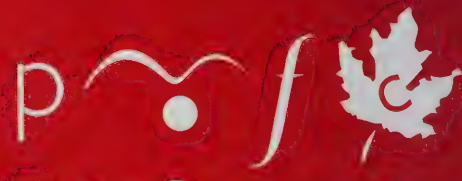
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Cumberland, the willow garden, the killing floor—the songs are like stepping stones added to an existing path. The arrangements are gorgeous, played with a skilled touch and handled with respect and wisdom.

Maybe why I love this album so much is it doesn't perform in front of you, asking for applause. Instead, it sits next to you, like a friend who seems to know exactly what you're about to say before you say it. They aren't trying to make you feel better about things, rather just to let you know that you're not alone.

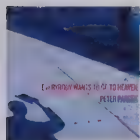
Which is why I don't like the title. It's actually about a shared experience, not an isolated one, full of voices, memories, and people just like you and me.

— By Glen Herbert

## Peter Parcek

Everybody Wants To Go To Heaven (Lightnin'

Records)



Fans of electric blues seldom think of New England as a legitimate incubation zone.

Yet, for fans of Peter Parcek—and especially his mother—it's a fact. Part celebration of her life, if not the foundation for his nerve-shearing, heartache-laden tone, Parcek's late mother plays a key role in his personal approach to the blues.

From her staunch support of his musical dreams to encouraging the young intender's detour to London to follow his love of British blues, Parcek's third album is very much a reflection of this love.

On *Heaven*, the percussion and production skills of Marco Giovino (Band of Joy), added to accompaniment by Spooner Oldham (keys), Dennis Crouch (bass), and the McCrarys (background vocals) further stir this sophisticated pot.

However, it's the highly personal songs such as *Every Drop Of Rain*—dedicated to his mother—that anoint this release with deep-dish elements of heartfelt soul that further deepen his blues-steeped sound.

Fans of this exceptional release



must promise to backtrack for another gem in 2010's *The Mathematics of Love*. At this rate, Boston may soon become known for much more than clam chowder and tea parties.

— By Eric Thom

## Clannad

Turas 1980 – Live in Bremen (Radio Bremen)



Clannad—a name to conjure with! The family band from County Donegal's combination of traditional folk and new-age mysticism was loved by many and reviled by some.

This double album was recorded right before they achieved international recognition and mainstream global chart success. There's

a conspicuous absence of the misty, ethereal music that sparked up many a scented candle and accompanied countless spiritual relaxation sessions.

Instead, we hear an incredibly vibrant band, blessed with wonderful family vocal harmonies, rolling through instrumental sets of jigs, reels, hornpipes, and well-chosen songs with enviable confidence and panache. They can stretch all the way from a suitably stately rendition of *Down By The Sally Gardens* to a contemporary, somewhat jazzy version of *Níl Sé'n Lá* (It's Not Day). Their presentation is down to earth with simple (perhaps for the benefit of the non-English speakers in this German audience) and often witty song introductions—which lend

further charm to *Live in Bremen*. This is a fine memento of the early stages of Clannad's development and should help us all to reap-praise their place in Irish and World music.

— By Tim Readman

## The Gloaming

Live at the NCH (Real World Records)



The idea for *The Gloaming* was hatched in 2013 and has grown into something of a musical phenomenon. The established duo of Martin Hayes (fiddle) and Dennis Cahill (guitar) is still at its core while Caoimhín Ó Raghallaigh (hardanger d'amore, a.k.a. 10-string fiddle), Iarla Ó Lionáird (vocals), and Thomas Bartlett (piano) weave in musical orbit around them.

After two well-received studio albums, they now try their hands at a live recording, featuring selections from their run of 17 sold-out shows at the National Concert Hall in Dublin.

To listen to this release is to delve into the quintessence of *The Gloaming*. The intrinsic and central constituent of its character is the performance of Irish music in an innovative and ever-evolving setting. The result is a blend, a hybrid, and a fusion, which has a hypnotic and charming effect





on the listener. Melodies are underpinned by unusual chord choices and meander along until they pick up enough momentum to drive forward. Waves of rhythm undulate and slowly build into a tsunami before dissipating into quietude.

Irish traditional music and song still forms the launching pad for their artistic meanderings, while free jazz, contemporary classical, and improvisational music all fuel their journey.

There are just six tracks on *Live at the NCH* but they contain more musical ideas than many bands will manage over six albums. Immerse yourself in this music and you will be thrilled, mesmerized, and inspired. Roaming in The Gloaming anyone? Just say YES!

— By Tim Readman

## Fatoumata Diawara

Fenfo (Wagram/Montuno)



Malian singer Fatoumata Diawara knocked us out with her first album, but

we've waited a long time for the second. In the seven-year interim, Diawara has collaborated with Cuban jazz pianist Roberto Fonseca and Malian diva Oumou Sangaré, as well as acting in several movies, notably the drama *Timbuktu*, filmed entirely in that city. Album No. 2 has finally come out—and it seals the deal.

All the songs on *Fenfo* ("something to say" in Bambara) are written by Diawara. They range in style from doowoppy pop *Dibi Bo* ("open your eyes") to traditional-sounding laments (*Kanou Dan Ye*). There are occasional personal love songs, but in typical Malian custom, most of the lyrics are commentaries on society and proper relationships. *Kokoro* exhorts: "Let's not turn our back on our traditional values". *Kanou Dan Ye* ("our love has no future") decries the tragedy of forbidding marriage between Mali's ethnic groups.

Since her debut album, Fatou-



Jory Nash

mata has grown in expressiveness. She is firmly in charge, her voice flexible and confident. The instrumentalists are superb, especially of note kora master Toumani Diabate and son Sidiki. The extraordinary cellist Vincent Segal accompanies Fatoumata in intimate style, and Brazilian percussionist Ze Luis Nascimento adds the chatty quica squeaks.

— By Lark Clark

## Jory Nash

The Wilderness Years (Thin Man Records)



There are so many artists and so many recordings these days that it's impossible to hear everything but this is a guy I'm sorry I hadn't got to before.

Jory Nash has had eight discs out previous to this one, has won numerous awards for songwriting, been a past artistic director of the Shelter Valley Folk Festival, and put on large-scale, multi-artist concerts and tours of Gordon Lightfoot songs.

His new disc is full of original and interesting lyrics that unfold in unexpected directions. The music has a relaxed feel. It's never strident, developing gently, never hitting you over the head. The

beauty of the arrangements, playing, and backing vocals constantly impresses and is never predictable. For someone who hears as many discs as this critic, it's a revelation.

The players are all top notch. A small sampling, in no particular order, are: Burke Carroll (pedal steel), Gary Craig (drums, percussion), Lori Cullen (harmony and backing vocals, and arrangement on one track), Robbie Grunwald (piano, organ, and various keyboard instruments), Oh Susanna (harmony and backing vocals),

Lydia Persaud (harmony and backing vocals), Dean Drouillard (guitars)...

It's a lovely recording and makes me eager to dig into this artist's back catalogue.

— By Barry Hammond

## Ian Tamblyn

Let It Go (North Track Records)



*Let It Go* is No. 38 on a stellar list of audio releases by one Mr. Ian Tamblyn, currently

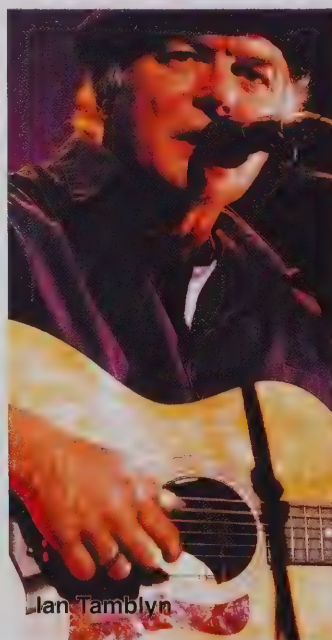
living in Chelsea, QC. He has done a lot of creative work, a lot of thematic works, and hardly ever sets a musical foot wrong. And he does not on effort No. 38.

It's a song collection of leftovers and orphans that may not have fit elsewhere but here, together, they paint a personal portrait of the various sides of Ian Tamblyn. Songs written on Sable Island, in Quebec, up north in Nunavut, in Greenland.

Songs about the inevitability of time, songs about northern love, and songs about actions that sear your heart forever.

*Let It Go* is a terrific, gentle, and kind little record. Just what I needed today. Thanks, Ian.

— By les siemieniuk



Ian Tamblyn



## Donovan Woods

Both Ways (Killbeat Music)



Donovan Woods, a 2016 Polaris Prize nominee and 2017 Juno winner for Songwriter of

the Year, has released his fifth album, *Both Ways*. A beautiful collection of 12 songs, creatively inspired by the works of Bronwyn Wallace, Richard Ford, and Alice Munro, *Both Ways* illustrates the juxtaposition of life, relationships, and personal perceptions. There is an artful tension, a push-pull effect in both the instrumentation and lyrics that is captivating and reassuring.

Woods has an eloquent way with telling a story. All the songs speak from the heart, about experience, about hurt, and about hope. Especially evident on the duet *I Ain't Ever Loved No One*, Rose Cousins and Woods present a delightful song of being in love and meeting the parents for the first time, tenderly capturing the effect of experience, and finding a path from hurt to hope. *Both Ways* is lush with beautiful arrangements, and Woods's soft, raspy, wistful voice makes for an honest and gracious listen.

— By Phil Harries

## Various Artists

Yiddish Glory: The Lost Songs of World



War II (Six Degrees)

You don't have to be Jewish to appreciate this amazing recording. It's not

only the music and production that's astounding, but the fact that these songs, all in Yiddish, have been found and given life.

All of the lyrics of these songs were written during the Second World War by Jews living in the Soviet Union. They were collected by a group of Soviet ethnomusicologists, as the war wound down, to preserve Jewish culture. The leader of this effort, Moisie Beregovsky, hoped to publish them, but was arrested under the Stalinist crackdown on Jews, and they sat in a box until the 1990s,



when they were unearthed by scholars.

Most of the scores were absent, but melodies and arrangements were composed by a Toronto-based collective of 10 classical and klezmer musicians, including five vocalists. Renowned Canadian jazz singer Sophie Milman is featured on five tracks, including an anonymous song, *Kazakhstan*, which has special meaning to Russia-born Milman, whose grandmother survived the war as a Jewish refugee in Kazakhstan.

Some of the songs were written by Jewish soldiers in the Red Army, and there is much stubborn optimism and dark humour that Hitler would be cut down in a bloody fashion. One is written by a 10-year-old girl mourning the death of her mother. Another by a 73-year-old woman who witnessed and survived the slaughter of thousands of Jews near Kiev. The last track, *Happy New Year 1944*, celebrates that the Soviets had the upper hand over the Nazis, and predicted that "*Hitler will be thrown around in fiery and icy hells and he can kiss our asses.*"

The melodies range from haunting to playful and the musicianship is stellar. Listening to these 18 tracks and following the translated lyrics is one of the most worthwhile hours you'll spend.

— By Mike Sadava

## Elvin Bishop's Big Fun Trio

Something Smells Funky 'Round Here

(Alligator Records)



A criminally short record, any release from the still-fun-loving 75-year old remains cause for celebration. Bishop's bandmates and pals Willy Jordan (vocals, percussion) and piano-player/guitarist Bob Welsh joined together to form their Big Fun Trio in '15 and big fun is clearly their *modus operandi*.

The highly political title track—one of six originals—is a raucous testament to these Trumpian times and Bishop & Trio aren't shy about expounding on the source of the funk.

Two spirited covers maintain a party atmosphere as this effervescent crew tackle Jackie Wilson's (*Your Love Keeps Lifting Me*) *Higher and Higher*, Jordan's trusty falsetto paying tribute to the original while the three-man rhythm machine breathes fresh life into a classic. Their cover of Ann Peebles's *I Can't Stand the Rain* serves up slide and a beefy organ backup as Jordan's vocal does its best to keep up.

A third, Dave Bartholomew/Fats Domino's *Another Mule*, receives a laidback, loping gait, the perfect complement to Bishop's down-home vocal approach. One of the

better originals is *That's The Way Willy Likes It*, a deceptively simple scum that combines Bishop's chicken-pickin' ways with some breakout, spiky guitar solos and a soulful blues vocal by Jordan.

Likewise, *Bob's Boogie* permits an opportunity for Welsh to unleash his barrelhouse piano down a railway track, one of two instrumentals. The second, *Stomp*, is a revisited Bishop staple that features his inimitable, rootsy approach to both fingerstyle and slide guitar.

Fans of Bishop's spoken words of wit and wisdom will relish his three stages of life on *Looking Good*, although you keep hoping Elvin will cut loose with his patented guitar scorch.

Bishop's spunky trio covers a lot of turf, somewhat watering down what we've come to expect from the celebrated blues man alone, yet his good-time vibe remains intact and he injects enough of himself to keep you wanting more.

— By Eric Thom

## Mike Plume Band

Born By The Radio (Independent)



Mike Plume is a working musician and a road warrior who's always honing his craft,

whether he's up, down, working, not-working, playing, painting, giving up the business for good,



getting a flash of inspiration, staring blankly at the wall, or recording a new disc.

He's been doing it since he was 15. Experience pays off. His new disc (he's had at least nine earlier discs) is a stripped-down-to-basics affair: guitars, drums, bass, keyboards, and not much in the way of frills.

But he's a craftsman in the way a tradesman becomes a master carpenter. There's some damn-well-written songs and solid playing throughout. Some of the best songs on this outing are *Waste A Kiss On Me* (co-writer: Trevor Rosen), *Long Long Line Of Fools* (co-writer: Brent Maher), *Mama's Rolling Stone* (co-writer: Tim Hicks), or his own *Monroe's Mandolin*. If you like a homemade table made out of beautiful wood, sanded, lacquered, and polished to Americana antique splendor this is a disc you'll enjoy. Or if you like basic meat and potatoes stuff, this is gourmet comfort food.

— By Barry Hammond

## Maxim and Gervais Cormier

Cape Breton Guitar (MCP Music)



The clear, clean, and quick guitar on Maxim Cormier's fourth studio album, a collaboration with his father, Gervais Cormier, shows off the ability and technique of the players in fine fashion. Focussed primarily on Celtic traditionals with some slightly newer tunes (destined to become traditionals) by the likes of John Morris Rankin and Jerry Holland, the simply titled *Cape Breton Guitar* is a smooth, stripped-down recording. The skill and musical instincts of both musicians shine through.

Maxim is a true guitar scholar and these adaptations of (mostly) fiddle tunes into his own flat-picking style of guitar playing create unique and contemporary sound while maintaining a very clear link to Cape Breton tradition. Whether you are a lover of this tradition or

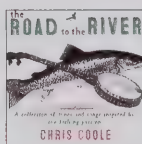


simply appreciate an extremely well-played guitar, the album is sure to please.

— By Tanya Corbin

## Chris Coole

The Road to the River (Independent)



In the world of magic, there are the big stage illusions—cutting a person in half, making an elephant disappear—and there is table magic—cards, coins, cups, and balls. The two are both thought of equally as magic, but they are of such different orders as to be different undertakings entirely.

But to the connoisseur, the close work takes the day—it's smaller, more intimate, requires a greater facility, and is often more meaningful. This latest release from Chris Coole is an example of the table magic of the musical world: seemingly limited resources are manipulated to reveal an impossible range of emotion. It requires close attention, and it rewards that attention.

Not everything here is new. Most of the material has been released prior, with a number of tracks recorded for this project in particular. The reason is because it's a fundraiser for the Elk River

Alliance, which is great, of course. But even if you know these tunes, the project nevertheless feels new. The various pieces speak to one another, and sit comfortably within a new frame.

Coole is an avid fly-fisher, and it seems some of the other musicians that are featured here are, too, including Arnie Naiman and, if new to it, fiddler John Showman. The project is a testament to his passion for fishing.

Coole brings the full range of experience to the material, from the contemplation of *Rainbow on the Moormons*—the bowed bass there is a study in doing a lot with little—to the humour of

*Hell To Pay*, a children's tune for the child in all of us. Throughout, it's a window onto worlds that we don't see every day—clawhammer banjo and fly-fishing—though it will make you wish you could.

— By Glen Herbert

## Manitoba Hal

Blues Is In The Water (Independent)

## Manitoba Hal



Live In Ghent (Independent)

A busy lad, that Manitoba Hal (a.k.a. Hal Brolund), releasing two discs almost simultaneously. Of those, *Blues Is In The Water* uses a combination of looping technology and effects to showcase his amazing ukulele musicianship that rivals any blues guitar riffs, and pairs well with his deep baritone voice and skilful mastery, passion, and love of the southern blues.

With the song *Alligator*, Hal takes us on a charming Robert Johnson-esque blues history romp—through a 50-square-mile region of the Mississippi Delta. *Peel Myself Away*, a beautifully bright and airy song about priorities, illustrates Hal's dazzling fingerpicking style. Another





highlight is *My Dyin' Day*, simply stated: a blues baptismal. Hal believes the blues is in the water and it can cleanse us all. Ukulele and blues lovers alike can find lots to enjoy here.

His unique approach to the blues can also be found on the 24-track, double live CD set of standards, *Live In Ghent*.

Recorded at Missy Sippy Blues & Roots Club in Ghent, Belgium, it captures him on his game! A solid recording from start to finish, with bright production and remarkable musicianship. High-points include Hal's interpretation of Mississippi John Hurt's *Evangeline Blues* with his dynamic fingerpicking, an energetic version of Robert Johnson's *Sweet Home Chicago*, and a brilliant adaption of B.B. King's *The Thrill Is Gone*.

All in all, *Live In Ghent* is a cracker of an album, showcasing a ukulele blues maestro at his best.

— By Phil Harries

## Crybaby

Still (Independent)



Crybaby was a Canadian alt-country band from Toronto who made a splash

with *Paintings*, their debut disc in 1996. Since then, they all moved on to other projects and singer Rae Billings did several solo projects after she moved to Hamilton.

In 2016, they got together for a 20-year reunion concert, which led to this new disc, which is something of a revival for them.

Based around Billings's voice, a low, full-throated, resonant instrument with an emotional quaver, the disc is another example of how many great musicians and bands there are in this country. The guitars of Andrew Aldbridge (Sarah Slean) and Steve Koch (Ron Sexsmith) make this an exceptional project but so does everyone involved, from Lucky Pete Lambert on drums to Scott Bell and Greg Brisco (bass and keys, respectively).

One of the highlights is a languidly mean version of the classic



Chris Wood

Bobby Gentry hit *Ode To Billy Joe*, but the other Billings-penned tracks are equally compelling: dark, simmering tales delivered as only Billings can put them across. Strong stuff.

— By Barry Hammond

## Chris Wood

So Much To Defend (RUF)



With multiple wins at the BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards, topped, surely, by his

stunning *Hollow Point*—which details the 2005 shooting of the innocent Brazilian electrician Jean Charles de Menezes by British security forces on the London underground—justifiably recognized as The Folk Song of the Year in 2011, Chris Wood has a prestigious pedigree. And that's a fact. Always an intriguing, thoughtful writer, *So Much To Defend* unfolds like a series of short stories—stark vignettes of everyday characters going about their unremarkable daily routines: participating in yoga classes, watching crap football matches, swimming at the local baths, raising money for charity, sending drunken text messages... And yet, it's in the unembellished ordinariness of these various scenes that make these songs so utterly absorbing.

Of course, this is not a disc for the faint of heart; it's occasionally

as grim as it's captivating. But let's not discount the grin-raising, autobiographical *More Fool Me*—a caustic but reassuring inside view of the charms and perils of the life of a folksinger. Wood's singing is restrained but tasteful with flugelhorn, piano, banjo, and Hammond organ adding minimum embellishment to his impressive acoustic guitar picking. He's adventurous, too, stretching out from the dark, bluesy *The Flail* to the jazz inflections of *1887* and *Strange Cadence*. All the same, it's Wood's lyrical flourishes that carry the day, and no example more indicative than the beautiful *You May Stand Mute*, with its key line: "*None dispute the desert of a life lived without love.*" Ah yes, exquisite.

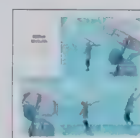
Like all great recordings, *So*

*Much To Defend* reveals more and more of its subtleties and nuances with repeated listening. Another masterful and challenging disc, then, from Chris Wood. What else do you need to know?

— By Roddy Campbell

## Preetam Sengupta

Patience (Independent: [www.preetam.ca](http://www.preetam.ca))



The bio on Guelph, ON-based Preetam Sengupta's website nails it in the first line.

It describes his approach as his "Nick Drake-y singer/songwriter tell-me-a-story style."

Indeed, *Patience* evokes the spirit of the late Drake, a legendary British '70s singer/songwriter whose ethereal, gentle style has influenced many young singer/



Preetam Sengupta



songwriters.

It aptly describes Sengupta's light and at times whispery gentle vocals that work so well with his melodic stories. The songs on *Patience* are hopeful with a touch of melancholy, or melancholy with a touch of hopefulness, depending on whether you're a half-full or a half-empty person. The spare arrangements also work well, mostly just voice and guitar, with modest and tasteful touches of viola, cello, bass, and banjo (with one exception, the bonus CD track that is a little ska-styled surprise).

The album's title is particularly appropriate because it was recorded after Sengupta underwent brain tumour surgery. He patiently relearned to play the guitar as he recuperated. That also explains the "Thanks for the new head" dedication on the CD cover to his medical team.

— By Eric Rosenbaum

## Eliza Gilkyson

*Secularia* (Red House Records)



Eliza Gilkyson's singing voice recalls a mother reading a story to her child—a loving, intimate whisper of a voice that simply feels good to be around. On *Secularia*, we're treated to 11 originals and a bittersweet reading of a timeless traditional song as the fully invested singer/songwriter articulates the world around us with the supportive, compassionate compass of a woman who cares very deeply about where we're heading next.

From the opening strands of the simple-seeming *Solitary Singer*, *Secularia* washes over you—one of the most important releases I can remember—providing a perfect, heartfelt salve for these most challenging of times.

With an accomplished catalogue of 20 releases, the double Grammy winner has just recorded her magnum opus—each track surpassing the last—as each carefully crafted soundstage serves to accentuate every poignant lyric, achieving an



almost meditative state.

Sparse instrumentation comprised of acoustic/electric guitar, fiddle, piano, and pedal steel weave pure magic around Gilkyson's hymn-like psalms and benedictions as carefully chosen vocalists supply heavenly harmonies.

The near-perfect *In The Name Of The Lord* celebrates our time of fools amidst a province of evil, as the angelic voices of Delia Castillo and Adrienne Pedrotti join Gilkyson's to provide the light that's clearly been missing.

The comparatively simple *Dreamtime* sails on the gossamer wings of Warren Hood's fiddle, supported by Gilkyson's acoustic guitar and (her son/producer) Cisco Ryder's piano, suspending fear in the face of the ultimate reckoning.

*Sanctuary* combines Gilkyson's lead while Sam Baker delivers his own soulful stanza, as if on the threshold of his own painful crossover, carried by a breathtaking, three-part harmony. And while the stunning *Emmanuelle*, buoyed by the bowed bass of Chris Maresh and electric sting of Mike Hardwick's guitar, is positively breathtaking in its beauty, it's the otherworldly duet between Gilkyson and the late, great Jimmy LaFave that practically stops time with their cover of *Down By The Riverside*. Facing

the ultimate crossover of his own, LaFave's focus is unyielding, on a bed of bowed dulcimer, accordion, penny whistle, if not gut-wrenching melancholy.

*Instrument* pairs Mike Hardwick's guitar to Gilkyson's piano as she outlines the frailty of humankind against a backdrop of crippling unworthiness. Like all of us, Gilkyson is looking for answers as she probes our collective spirituality, or lack thereof, and the reasons for the state of our world. Through her questioning, she underlines our innate desire to shine, to accept responsibility for our actions and to strive to be accountable. *Secularia* rekindles in us the power of hope, the real potential for change, and our individual obligation to rise above.

— By Eric Thom

## Georgia Lewis

*The Bird Who Sings Freedom* (RootBeat Records)



This is the debut album from English folk artist Georgia Lewis. It features oft-recorded traditional songs such as *Gypsies* (a.k.a. *The Raggle Taggle Gypsy*) and *The Wife of Usher's Well* alongside two Lewis originals and a couple of poems to music.

Lewis provides vocals, whistle, accordion, shruti box and stepping and is well supported by a band

including Rowan Piggott (fiddle, piano, vocals), Tom Sweeney (double bass), Even Carson (bodhran, percussion), and Felix Miller (guitar).

Lewis's vocal style is bright and airy and well suited to the arrangements. There's a few instrumental tunes added on to the ends of songs as well—such as *March of the Crows*, which follows *Gypsies*—all of which are well played and serve to add some variety to the album.

All in all, this is a good, solid first release. What remains to be seen is whether Lewis has the ability to distinguish herself from the many other talented English women folk artists, by way of originality and innovation.

— By Tim Readman

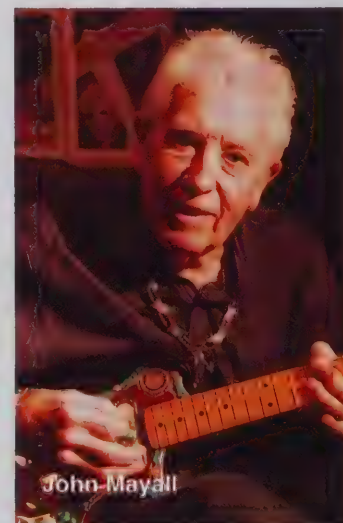
## John Mayall

*Three For The Road* (Forty Below Records)



That John Mayall is alive, let alone still churning out quality blues and live performances,

is the stuff of storybooks. The Godfather of British Blues is no blithering octogenarian—in fact, he remains damned prolific. Carrying on from last year's Grammy-nominated *Talk About That*, Mayall has continued with his trio format (longtime cohorts Jay Davenport, drums, and Greg Rzab, bass) all the way to Germany and beyond.





And while you might not expect much more than Mayall Lite, given his approach puréed down to harmonica, keyboards, vocals, bass, and drums, you'll be delighted in getting reacquainted with Mayall's abilities—as he has.

His keyboard excursions serve to fill the void left behind by Rocky Athas's guitar, providing a surprisingly rich backdrop to these nine tracks (covers, save two originals). Mayall claims that the accidental absence of guitar from their sound led to a newfound interplay between bass and drums, creating fresh dynamics and a live sound that seemed more personal, more upfront.

You can hear it on Eddie Taylor's *Big Time Playboy* and Lightnin' Hopkins's *I Feel So Bad*—so much so that Mayall chooses to anoint only certain songs with his patented harp, his well-known rasp of a vocal providing the glue to the live show.

Mayall's B3 prowess christens the new *Streamline* while Henry Townsend's *Tears Came Rollin' Down* slows things down to feature sparkling piano and a spirited vocal. Their crowning achievement is the 11-minute cover of Sonny Landreth's *Congo Square*, all chuggin' harp, sturdy backbeat and hard-plucked bass.

Not to be outdone, Davenport plays as multiple drummers, turning in a standout solo on Curtis Salgado's *The Sum of Nothing* while Rzab's basslines on *Ridin' on the L&N* and *Don't Deny Me* help redefine the instrument. For the man who begat the British



Gordie Tentrees & Jaxon Haldane

blues-rock tradition, discovering a *Who's Who* of guitarists (Green, Clapton, Taylor, Montoya, Trout, Whittington, Athas), Mayall's guitar-free trio effortlessly conjures the magic of British blues by breaking most of the rules. Who says you can't teach an old dog new tricks?

— By Eric Thom

## Winter Wilson

Far Off On The Horizon (Independent)



There couldn't be a more classic folk disc than this. It's everything that defines folk music and what makes it great: simple, melodic, and rhythmic songs with strong, moving stories played in simple arrangements with depth of feeling on guitar, banjo, accordion,

or harmonica with subtle touches of well-arranged strings or maybe some hand-clapping.

Stories about immigrants, wandering sons or daughters, cruel fathers, early death, lost love, hard work, seafaring, injustice, and faith.

Winter Wilson is the duo of Kip Winter (vocals, accordion, guitar, flute) and Dave Wilson (vocals, guitar, banjo). They have gorgeous voices: hers full, plaintive, bluesy, and tuneful; his a mellow, clear, lovely tenor. He's from Sleaford, Lincolnshire, and she was born in Germany, lived in Holland, England, Scotland, and France but is "fiercely Scottish".

Together, they're classics and should be right up there in the pantheon of greats. They've put out nine discs since 1996 and went

from amateur to full-time in 2012. All their songs are self-penned and deserve to be as widely known as classics by Woodie Guthrie or other giants in the field. Truly golden oldies.

— By Barry Hammond

## Gordie Tentrees & Jaxon Haldane

Grit (Greywood Records)



Gordie Tentrees is originally from Hamilton, ON, a hardscrabble kid who overcame early

domestic problems to become a veteran road warrior with more than 2,000 festivals and concerts under his belt.

Jaxon Haldane came from Winnipeg, MB, was front man for the mutant bluegrass band D-Rangers, but now lives in Oklahoma City.

They kept meeting at various festivals, and on this debut disc together they play a rough-and-ready roots music with bluesy influences.

As they say in the song *Bottleneck To Wire*: "*Some sounds in our town you can hear no longer / They came in from the south and made the cold a little warmer / From the dampening hands a little man who put bottleneck to wire / It's a sound I wish I could hear longer.*"

Yearning for those sounds is apparently what they had in common. The bottleneck, Dobro, banjo, fiddle saw, harmonica, etc. of these early minstrels are the order of the day.

The disc is recorded live at various venues in Alberta by veteran engineer Scott Franchuk. The disc is called *Grit* and although the recording has some of the raw instrumental feel of those early blues shouters, it leaves the listener a little less satisfied in the songwriting department. Those early recording troubadours sang about sex, natural disasters, made social or political commentary, or had a folksy humour.

The pair are fine when they stick to modern gems like the Tommy Womack/Will Kimbrough penned





*I Don't Have A Gun*, but some of their humour is a little lightweight, like their poke at millennials in *Craft Beards & Man Buns*. Or they sing lyrics such as: "Dynamite / Toblerone / I cannot lie / There goes my nose," from *Holy Moly*, which sounds like they could have been random rhyming and still need refining. Still, a promising debut.

– By Barry Hammond

## Lydia Persaud

Low Light (Independent)



You might associate the ukulele with raccoon coats and vintage crooners such as George

Formby, Frank Crumit, Jiminy Cricket (Cliff Edwards), and Tiny Tim. Or, possibly, Hawaiian music such as Israel Kamakawiwo'ole or Don Ho. Well, after the release of this four-song sampler, you're going to have to revise your idea of the ukulele.

How about you think of it as an instrument of soulful, sophisticated, rootsy jazz? That's the kind of effect this disc and the career of Toronto's Lydia Persaud could have. Having come up through Humber College's jazz program and stints as a backup singer with Jill Barber, Jadea Kelly, and others, and performing with The O'Pears and Dwayne Gretzky, the singer is using this disc to announce her arrival as an artist in her own right.

It's an impressive debut. Her voice is one of those that grabs your attention right off, pulling you into the music. Her delivery is clear and soulful, and her songwriting is subtle and effective, especially the title track. This girl is going places.

This critic hasn't heard as impressive a debut since he heard k.d. lang singing in a lounge before she'd even recorded. The production is first rate, too, with Robbie Grunwald (Jill Barber, The

Good Lovelies) producing and playing, as well as instrumentation by Joel Schwartz (Birds Of Chicago), and Josh Van Tassel (The Great Lake Swimmers). Buy this disc and you'll be able to say you got in on the ground floor of a career as big as that of Rhiannon Giddens or Kaia Kater. She's that good.

– By Barry Hammond

## Looping Brothers

Wrong Road Again (Independent)



The Looping Brothers are perhaps the best known bluegrass band from Germany. No, it's not so much of an accolade if it's followed by "Oh! I didn't know they had bluegrass bands in Germany." They do. At least one anyway.

Well, they aren't brothers, and no one in the band is named Looping—it's kind of a joke, by the band's own admission, a play on

Louvin Brothers most directly. As such, there is a bit of a camp feel to some of this, and it carries over to the intro and outro on this disc, the first being an homage to the Grand Ol Opry song that doesn't work as well as they intended.

Where the release really gains is in the dedication to the core of the music. The songs are well chosen, and for anyone who shares their love for this stuff—this listener included—it's a bit like flipping through a treasured photo album.

There's A.P. and Sara! And John and Hank and Jimmy. Some of the choices don't seem to blend as well, and the Gordon Lightfoot track, *Bitter Green*, is a bit of a stretch for this collection. But, again, you've got to appreciate their verve. A highlight is *Gold Watch and Chain*, which features the sublime Wayne Henderson and Helen White. Great people, and no doubt the Looping Brothers are, too.

– By Glen Herbert

# Critiques

## Ian Tamblyn

Let It Go (North Track Records)



*Let It Go* est le no 38 sur une liste stellaire d'albums réalisés par un certain M. Ian Tamblyn, vivant actuellement à Chelsea, QC. Il a

créé beaucoup et a fait de nombreuses œuvres thématiques et il ne fait presque jamais de faux pas musical. Le no 38 en témoigne.

Recueil de chansons inutilisées et orphelines qui n'auraient peut-être pas pu aller ailleurs qu'ensemble, l'album offre un portrait personnel des différents côtés d'Ian Tamblyn. Les chansons ont été écrites sur l'île de Sable, à Québec, dans le Nord au Nunavut et au Groenland.

Elles parlent du temps qui passe inexorablement, d'amours nordiques et d'actions qui vous touchent droit au cœur, pour toujours.

*Let It Go* est un album formidable, plein

de douceur et de gentillesse. J'avais juste-ment besoin de ça aujourd'hui. Merci, Ian.

– Par Les Siemieniuk

Traduit par Véronique G.-Allard

## The Gloaming

Live at the NCH (Real World Records)



L'idée de The Gloaming est née en 2013 et est devenue une sorte de phénomène musical. Le duo reconnu composé de Martin Hayes

(violin) et de Dennis Cahill (guitare) forme toujours le noyau du groupe tandis que Caoimhín Ó Raghallaigh (violin Hardanger d'amore, c.-à-d. à 10 cordes), Larla Ó Lionáird (chant) et Thomas Bartlett (piano) gravitent dans leur orbite musicale.

Après deux albums ayant été bien accueillis, ils nous proposent un enregistrement devant public présentant des sélections de leur suite de 17 concerts à guichets fermés au National Concert Hall de Dublin.

Écouter cet album, c'est plonger dans la quintessence de The Gloaming. La manière innovante et toujours en évolution dont ils jouent de la musique irlandaise constitue

la pierre d'assise de leur style. En résultent un mélange, une hybridation et une fusion aux effets hypnotiques et charmants. Les mélodies sont soutenues par des choix inhabituels d'accords et louvoient jusqu'à ce qu'elles atteignent l'élan nécessaire pour aller de l'avant. Les vagues rythmiques ondulent et s'accumulent lentement et engendrent un tsunami, qui se dissipe ensuite dans la quiétude.

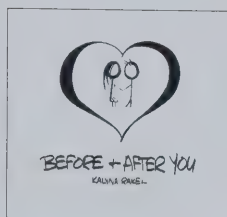
La musique et la chanson traditionnelles irlandaises servent toujours de plateforme de lancement pour leurs méandres artistiques, tandis que le free jazz, la musique contemporaine et la musique improvisée propulsent leur aventure.

*Live at the NCH* compte seulement six pistes, mais il contient plus de propositions musicales que ce qu'auraient pu proposer la plupart des groupes en six albums. Une simple immersion s'avère palpitante, magnétique, inspirante... Êtes-vous prêts à vibrer à la fréquence de The Gloaming? Dites juste OUI!

Par Tim Readman

Traduit par Véronique G.-Allard





# À la rencontre de Kalyna Rakel

**I**l y a six ans, Kalyna Rakel travaillait comme barmaid, mais la musique était sa passion. Ses parents étaient dans des groupes de musique et elle passait son temps à écrire des chansons. Elle savait qu'il était temps d'apporter des changements dans sa vie.

Comme tant de jeunes avant elle, elle a économisé de l'argent, quitté son travail et a traversé l'océan avec son sac à dos pour voyager en Europe, sans connaître sa destination du lendemain, une aventure en entraînant une autre.

Un jour elle s'est réveillée et s'est rendu compte que son argent et son passeport avaient disparu. Cela s'avéra être sa chance et lui a permis de rencontrer un groupe de musiciens et de les accompagner dans leur mode de vie tzigane, et d'en apprendre plus sur leur vision de la vie.

Lors de son dernier arrêt, elle était à Paris, en train de contempler je ne sais quoi. C'est là qu'elle a eu une « révélation ». Il était temps d'apprendre la guitare. Enfin, les quelques vidéos publiées sur YouTube et les milliers d'heures à accumuler de la corne sur les doigts en jouant dans la rue ont finalement payé.

« Jouer dans la rue est ce qui m'a poussée à apprendre la guitare » explique Rakel. « C'était ma manière de pratiquer et de travailler sur ma musique sans me mettre de pression. »

Elle a ensuite enregistré quatre albums indépendants avec des amis, la plupart du temps dans des studios de maison. Puis elle a amené ses chansons faire le tour du monde, jouant pour qui voulait l'entendre.

À 27 ans, Rakel est maintenant une auteure-compositrice d'expérience et elle nous revient avec son album le plus ambitieux à ce jour : *Before & After*. Avec ses douze chansons réparties entre les deux côtés (A : *Before* et côté B : *After* et côté), l'album concept raconte les nombreuses étapes d'une relation et contient une bande dessinée de 24 pages exécutée à l'encre par la musicienne dont les cases correspondent à chaque chanson.

Avec sa voix rauque qui rappelle celle de Janis Joplin, Rakel crée un son unique découlant de ses trois influences principales : le jazz, le folk et le blues.

Quand je lui ai parlé, elle venait juste de revenir à sa maison de Kensington Market, au cœur du centre-ville de Toronto; où elle avait écrit plusieurs des chansons de *Before & After* (dont *Who Knew* et *Taylor Swift*). Dans le texte de pochette, Rakel écrit : « Aie confiance dans le processus ». C'est ce que l'auteure-compositrice a dû faire pour réaliser son ambitieux projet.

Habitée à travailler seule, elle a dû s'abandonner au processus et écouter l'avis de ses collaborateurs pour les laisser l'aider à réaliser l'œuvre finale.

« Il faut avoir confiance dans le fait que chacun fera sa part » explique la musicienne. « Parfois, quand c'est ta propre musique, tu veux que les choses soient faites d'une certaine manière. J'ai toujours réalisé moi-même mes albums, alors il a fallu que j'apprenne à collaborer et ça a été toute une expérience. Souvent, quand on fait confiance aux gens, à soi-même et au processus, on se rend compte que la magie opère. »

*Before & After* a commencé à prendre forme après une rencontre avec son producteur, meilleur ami et bassiste George Chenery. Il a fallu plus d'un an et demi pour le terminer en comptant l'ordre des chansons, les pratiques, l'enregistrement des pistes pilotes, le mixage et la mastérisation. En résulte l'enregistrement le plus travaillé de la jeune carrière de Rakel, duquel elle est très fière.

« J'ai voulu faire une bande dessinée, car quand j'étais enfant, je me souviens comment je réagissais quand je recevais un nouvel album : je regardais toutes les images une par une et je lisais toutes les phrases du texte de pochette », relate Rakel. « Aujourd'hui, tout est téléchargeable et virtuel; le dessin est une façon de ramener l'aspect artisanal de la musique. »

– Par David McPherson







## L'Orchestre Pic-bois

**Où on aborde les styles du jazz d'habitants et du funklore à l'aide d'instruments à cordes.**

**Par Marc Bolduc**  
**Traduit par Véronique G.-Allard**

**L'**Orchestre Pic-bois, un groupe de musique folk québécois, faisait tranquillement paraître son premier album en mai dernier à Joliette. Sur la pochette au fond jaune éclatant se découpe un Grand Pic à huppe rouge, en tenue d'astronaute, sur ce qui semble être une nouvelle planète, tenant un banjo d'une main et pointant au loin de l'autre. Cette magnifique illustration réalisée par

Mathilde Cinq-Mars rend bien le ton général de l'album : un folklore reposant sur des assises traditionnelles solides, mais qui n'hésite pas à regarder au loin, ni à explorer de nouvelles contrées musicales. Cette proposition aurait pu paraître pompeuse si elle n'avait pas émané de musiciens aguerris. En effet, bien qu'il s'agisse d'un premier album pour le groupe, la formation est composée de jeunes vétérans : Nicolas Babineau (Babineau-Chartrand), Hugo Blouin (MAZ), Jean Desrochers (Rivière Rouge) et Jean-Philippe Kiernan (Tu m'en diras tant), qui proviennent d'horizons musicaux différents et ont comme point commun leur attrait pour le folklore québécois.

L'orchestre Pic-bois tire son nom de différentes sources d'inspiration. Selon Jean Desrochers, il s'agissait d'illustrer le caractère musical du groupe, l'accent principal portant sur les instruments à cordes piquées ou pincées (mandoline, guitare, banjo, contrebasse), même

si le violon, la guimbarde et l'harmonica y trouvent aussi une belle part. De plus, comme l'oiseau percussif qui leur a inspiré leur nom, ils utilisent beaucoup les percussions, particulièrement la podorythmie (taper du pied). Pour ce qui est du terme «orchestre», il a été retenu pour éviter des confusions avec des formations déjà existantes, mais aussi pour rendre hommage aux ensembles musicaux qui faisaient danser les gens et qui se revendiquaient sans problème de ce terme.

La terminologie utilisée n'est clairement pas innocente, les membres de L'Orchestre Pic-bois forment un ensemble qui travaille démocratiquement pour recueillir les points de vue de chacun et prend en considération toutes les expériences individuelles, pour en arriver à quelque chose de nouveau. Cette approche fondée sur l'importance des multiples points de vue constitue sans doute une des forces du groupe, car elle permet d'explorer une grande



variété de styles musicaux faisant partie du paysage folk nord-américain. Jean Desrochers compare l'esprit de corps qui lie les membres du groupe à celui qu'on retrouve dans un vestiaire de hockey après un match : un lien unique unit les joueurs et tous se sentent complices et à l'aise ensemble. Cet esprit de corps fut nécessaire pour mener à bien la parution de l'album, car, que ce soit pour le choix des pièces, leurs arrangements, la réalisation de l'album (Nicolas Babineau), la conception graphique de la pochette (Hugo Blouin) ou le financement, chacun a participé à l'obtention du résultat final.

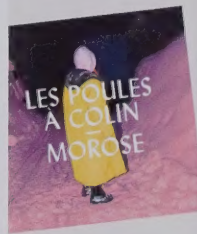
Il est difficile d'apposer une étiquette précise à la musique de L'Orchestre Pic-bois puisque chaque pièce propose quelque chose de différent. L'exercice serait vain selon Jean Desrochers puisque le groupe vise une musique authentique (en partant de sources originales, de ce qu'on leur a transmis ou de collections) à laquelle il donne une «tangente roots», sans toutefois avoir peur d'amener la pièce plus loin. Par exemple, le groupe se reconnaît dans l'expression «jazz d'habitants», popularisée par Normand Miron (*Le bruit court dans la ville*) pour exprimer ce folk qui groove aux accents parfois jazzés, mais il se sent aussi à l'aise avec l'étiquette country ou même funklore puisqu'il navigue couramment dans différents styles musicaux. Les instruments principaux pourraient rappeler l'univers bluegrass, fait remarquer Hugo Blouin, mais lorsque que la contrebasse se met à jouer des reels ou quand l'harmonica ou l'égoïne entrent en scène, le style musical devient tout simplement inclassable.

Pour ce qui est de l'album de 12 pistes, L'orchestre Pic-bois s'avère être équilibré, présentant autant de chansons que de pièces instrumentales (six chacune). Le groupe puise dans le répertoire ancien jusqu'au répertoire pop folk du milieu du 20e siècle qu'il aborde avec humour et dans le registre propre à chaque interprète. Trois chansons s'intéressent aux misères des gens, «*Sans logement*» (Daniel Racine) parle des conditions de vie des sans-abri; «*Pas loin là-bas*», joué dans un style appalachien bluegrass, parle des mésaventures d'un gars qui essaie vainement de faire tourner sa chance, tandis que «*Je bois du Gingotte*» (écrit par Gérald Côté) parle des difficultés rencontrées lorsqu'on se sent étranger dans une fête. Sur une note plus légère, «*Chartier*» (issue du répertoire de Daniel Perron) est une chanson de mensonges (chaque couplet raconte un mensonge, ce qui rend l'histoire totalement absurde) et «*Belle Rose*» compare une chapelle secrète à faire l'amour (!!!). Quant à «*Des taxes, des taxes*» d'Oscar Thiffault, elle évoque les lamentations des contribuables contemporains. Sur le plan musical, L'Orchestre Pic-bois revisite certains classiques traditionnels québécois. La première piste présente une version puissante et respectueuse des pièces originales «*Casse-Reel*» (Aimé Gagnon) et «*The Brandy*» (Ozaname Chouinard), mais en plus, l'improvisation sur les mélodies amène les pièces sur un terrain plus contemporain.

Le même procédé s'applique à la «*Suite Grandmaison*», qui présente des versions inspirées de la «*Gigue des Grandmaison*» (Ferdinand Dionne) et de «*La Ronfleuse*» (Thomas Pomerleau), pour notre plus grand plaisir. Même s'il se fonde sur le respect de la tradition, L'Orchestre Pic-bois a aussi des compositions charmantes qui lui sont propres, la plupart de Jean-Philippe Kiernan («*Reel du p'tit muret*», «*Reel Ataboy*» et «*Reel des Prairies*») et de Jean Desrochers («*Reel autrichien*», «*La marche aux Dalles*», «*Gigue de l'explorateur*» ou la «*Valse du Manneken triste*»), cette dernière rendant hommage aux victimes de la fusillade de Bruxelles.

En conclusion, L'orchestre Pic-bois s'avère une proposition traditionnelle québécoise différente. Sans jamais perdre de vue l'essence du style, il s'aventure sur plusieurs pistes inhabituelles pour l'amateur de musique québécois. Cet album possède tous les ingrédients nécessaires pour attirer les passionnés de musique traditionnelle, particulièrement ceux qui aiment l'idée de sortir des sentiers battus et d'explorer de nouvelles manières de l'interpréter.

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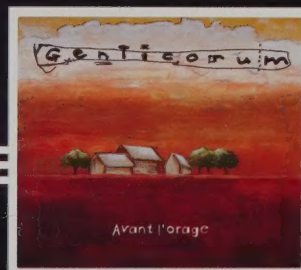


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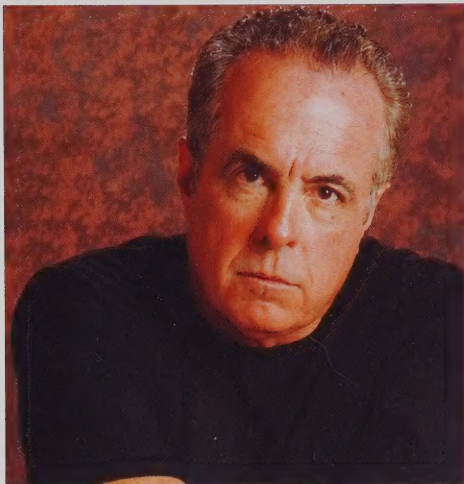
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**Tom Russell salutes the inspirational artistic creativity of two of his heroes: Ian & Sylvia.**

*The past is a foreign country:  
They do things differently there.*

— L.P. Hartley, *The Go Between*

2018. Hot July day. I'm sitting on our porch in a little farm town in Switzerland, writing songs. I get a note from a cowboy friend in Arizona that I should call Ian Tyson, because Ian's been "up and down" lately. Ian is 84.

After a few attempts I reach Tyson.

"You upright?" I ask.

"Barely," Ian says.

"You still drinking chardonnay?"

"I'll never give up my lifestyle," Ian rasps.

"How you feel?"

"I might make it through one more winter," he says.

There's a song in that line. I might make it through one more winter. Sounds like a Merle Haggard song. Or a Tyson cowboy classic.

Those lyrical sparks occur when I'm talking with Ian. He speaks in tongues: gnarled, poetic wit, sarcasm, dry humour, salty cowboy rant, and livid honesty. Every third line could trigger a song idea.

A year back, he was visiting us at our place in Santa Fe and I asked him why he didn't move down near us, where the winters were warmer.

"I can't leave those old horses," he said.

He was referring to his old horses and longhorn cows up in Alberta. That triggered my song about Ian on the *Folk Hotel* album.

Before that, I'd recorded an Ian & Sylvia tribute titled *Play One More: The Songs of Ian and Sylvia*, on True North Records.

When Tyson heard about that Ian & Sylvia project, he barked: "Russell, you should quit living in the past."

The past is, indeed, quicksand and a foreign country, soaked in myth, tradition, old folk songs, religion, ancestry, hero worship, whisky memory, romantic twists and turns, and all the elements and nursery rhyme stuff that forges who we are and what we write about.

My myth, or the palette I paint on, is deeply coloured by the music of Ian & Sylvia. As a duo, they recorded 13 albums filled with great songs, both traditional and original.

Along with Bob Dylan, they moved the modern song lyric forward. In 1970, their band, The Great Speckled Bird, helped forge what was then known as "folk rock," and that form has been caught up in the shifting tide of the labelling game—from western beat to no depression, to alt-country, to Americana.

After the duo broke up, Ian has gone on to revitalize modern cowboy music, recording albums filled with original classics. Sylvia has moved forward as well—great songs, records, radio shows, and novels. They're both still touring.

I've had the pleasure of co-writing songs with both Ian and Sylvia, and Sylvia and I co-edited a book of songwriter quotes, *And Then I Wrote: The Songwriter Speaks*. When I recorded the Ian & Sylvia tribute, I wanted to emphasize the depth of their catalogues beyond the obvious big songs such as *Four Strong Winds* and *You Were On My Mind*.

I'm back on our summer porch in Switzerland, reading Joseph Campbell's *Myths To Live By*. The book was written 50 years ago but Campbell stressed that art was on the decline, because artists were more interested in networking and cocktail parties than spending the needed time "engaged in the agony of solitary creative work". He says artists wanted to create "instant art," using "marketable styles and techniques."

Welcome to the modern age. All form, no content. Conferences. Crowd funding. Social networking. The good, the bad, and the ugly.

We need to delve back into the tradition and learn from it, following the long reach of Ian & Sylvia, and then add to the

tradition by writing from our own myth and soul. Moving the tradition forward. Rolling around in the agony of solitary creative work.

I'll leave you with a final Ian Tyson anecdote concerning tradition. About 10 years ago, Ian and I were out drinking in the bars of El Paso. Ian was trying to drown the pain of a busted-up second marriage and a recent romantic fling that had gone sour.

We were supposed to be writing a song the next day. We were both in bad shape, but Ian insisted we try to work. We were stumped on a song we'd started about a friend of ours, the muleteer Ross Knox, who'd been commanded by his bosses at the National Parks Service in Arizona to wear a crash helmet instead of a cowboy hat. Insurance reasons. Ross quit the job, as a cowboy would. We liked the story, but couldn't find a lyric form, or a way into the plot.

Ian stumbled out and sat down under an old elm tree. He was there for an hour or more, mumbling shards of an old ballad. Reaching back into the tradition. I stayed in the office, strumming my old Gibson. I was lost for ideas.

Then Ian reappears in the door and says, "You ever hear the old ballad *Lord Lovel*?"

"No," I said.

Then he closes his eyes and recites *Lord Lovel* (Child Ballad #75):

*Lord Lovel he stood at his own castle gate  
Combing his milk-white steed  
And by came Lady Nancy Belle  
To bid Lord Lovel Godspeed, Godspeed.  
And where are you going, Lord Lovel?"*

she said

*"And where are you going?" said she  
"I'm leaving, my Lady Nancy Belle,  
Strange countries for to see..."*

Ian was entranced with that opening: Lord Lovel combing his horse, and that line about strange countries for to see. I agreed. Sparked by the tradition and Tyson's blood memory of old ballads, we now had our form. We finished the song in an hour.

*Ross Knox stood by the round pen gate  
Combing his buckskin steed  
Along came his true love—the Lily of the West*

*Wishing her lover Godspeed*

Amen. There is still much to learn from the masters. And the tradition. Hail, the pioneers, and the long reach of Ian & Sylvia.

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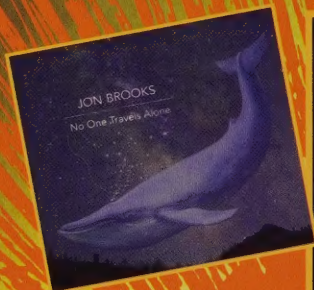
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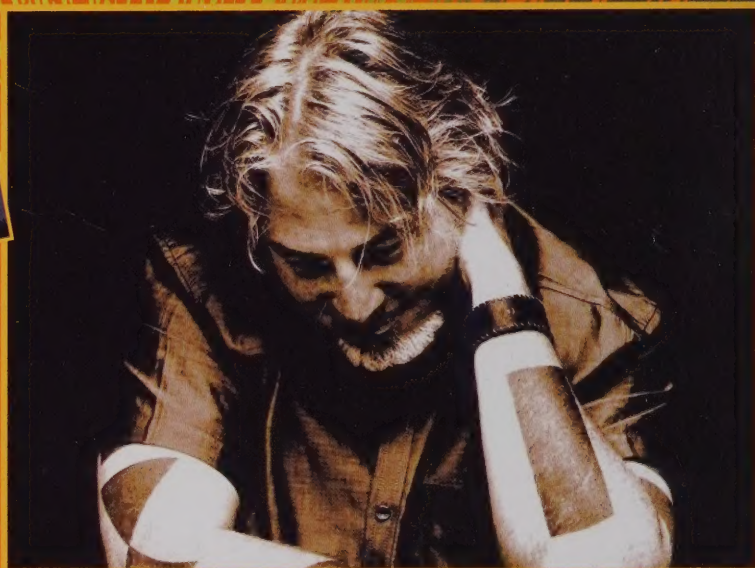
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